The Influence of Political and Economic Conditions on How Tertiary Students Use Facebook: A Comparative Study Between Iran and New Zealand

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the influence of political and economic conditions on how tertiary students use Facebook in Iran and New Zealand. The review of previous studies on social media, and specifically Facebook, shows that this topic has not received much attention from scholars in these countries. This study analyses the topic at both macro and micro-levels using a combination of the political economy, the public sphere, affordances, and a Foucauldian approach to discourse and power. The data were collected via face-to-face in-depth interviews, online questionnaires, document reviews, and observation of selected Facebook public pages.

Foucauldian discourse analysis was used to investigate power and resistance in Facebook discourse. The results suggest that the legal situation of Facebook in Iran has resulted in the separation of Facebook use from daily life in Iran. While in New Zealand using Facebook is part of the daily routines of tertiary students' lives, for Iranians using Facebook is more about experiencing things that are not accessible in their daily lives in Iran. In addition, the study shows that Iranians engage less than New Zealanders in online communication activities on Facebook, which is influenced by the political conditions in both countries. Furthermore, the quality of how tertiary students use Facebook in Iran and New Zealand has been influenced by economic conditions, and differences in economic infrastructures such as banking systems, law, and international economic relations. The results also show that the price and speed of access to the Internet can influence how tertiary students in Iran and New Zealand use Facebook. The study argues that although the platform is the same in Iran and New Zealand, the political and economic conditions of these countries can deeply influence how tertiary students use Facebook.

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Prologue

This thesis focuses on the use of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand to study how political and economic conditions in Iran and New Zealand influence how tertiary students use Facebook. It focuses on Facebook specifically because with more than two billion active users, Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the world and has played very significant roles in both Iran and New Zealand. For instance, during the Green Movement in Iran, Facebook was one of the most important tools that Iranians used to spread the information and organise their protests. In New Zealand after the 2010 and 2011 Christchurch earthquakes Facebook played a crucial role in sharing information (Dabner, 2012). This thesis covers a period of time in which Facebook underwent particular scrutiny because of a number of incidents. These include arguments around topics such as fake news after the U.S 2016 presidential election, live streaming of the Christchurch mosque attacks that motivated arguments about how much control Facebook has or should have over online activities, and the Cambridge Analytica data breaches that again opened up discussions about the privacy of the Facebook users and privacy violation (Levy, 2020).

Facebook was launched in 2005 as a site for students of Harvard University (Alsanie, 2015). Users could register, post their photos, and some information about themselves such as the club they belonged to or their study schedule. In 2006 Facebook was made publically available for people anywhere over the age of 13, and within two years its user base had surpassed Myspace, which was the most popular social media platform at that time. As its user base, political and economic power has expanded, Facebook has had a significant impact on political communication, and economic activity.

The political importance of Facebook was highlighted during the U.S presidential election campaigns of 2008, when supporters of Barak Obama and John Mc Cain created more than 1000 Facebook pages to express their support online. This was a significant shift in the political use of Facebook (Cogburn, 2011), following Howard Dean's use of web platforms in 2004 while campaigning for the Democratic Party nomination for the Presidency (Hindman, 2005). The capability and effectiveness of Facebook for political communication has grown since then, and was particularly significant in resistance movements such as the Tahrir movement in Egypt or the Green movement in Iran. At the same time, there are many claims about how Facebook can apply its political power and especially censorship against political activists and sometimes in favor of authoritarian regimes. Example of this include Facebook's compliance with the Turkish government to remove some shared content after the 2016 military coup attempt, and how Facebook accepted Russian government's demand to censor online messages from the political activist Alexy Navalni (Jankowicz, 2018).

Facebook has also changed the economic environment significantly, as it is used for advertising. According to Statista (2021) the worldwide popularity of Facebook, as the most popular social networking platform, has made this website the main platform for social media advertising, used by 94 percent of global marketers. The biggest proportion of Facebook company income is produced by advertising, totalling more than 82 billion USD in 2020. According to *The New Zealand Facebook and Instagram report* (2020), by the end of 2019 New Zealanders spent 1.6 billion dollars on digital advertising and social media, and with 23.2% growth, Facebook was the fastest growing advertising platform. Facebook also has access to users' personal data, which they use to target audiences for advertising. Brice Nixon (2017), argues that "power over attention" is the basis of communication businesses and the culture industry. Digital media companies such as Google and Facebook give space to

advertising companies and at the same time ask for money to access the online content and in these ways exploit the online audience.

By January 2021 Facebook had around 2 billion 740 million active users, while the closest number of users was for Youtube, with 2 Billion 294 million active users (Statistica 2021). While Whatsapp, Facebook messenger, and Instagram are less popular, all are owned by the Facebook company, consolidating its power over the most popular social networking platforms. Competitors like Snapchat, and Tiktok may have attracted many new younger users, but Facebook remains the most popular social networking platform in the world. The extent of its use means it is still the most effective platform, with a considerable influence on many current affairs, and so merits continued research attention.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Internet and Society

The Internet has spread throughout the world rapidly. Its easy accessibility and low cost have ensured its popularity in the past decades in most of the places in the world (Ryan, 2010) with different contextual conditions and needs. The Internet has been defined as a network of connected computers all over the world that enables the users to distribute data and communicate with each other (Dictionary, 2020). Carne defines the Internet as:

> a self-organizing, self-propagating entity whose goal is to provide worldwide, computer-to-computer communication. For those with access to a computer and an appropriate connection, the Internet provides data communication that, among other things, can be used to post or obtain information, send emails, complete financial transactions, advertise products, order goods, exchange pictures and videos, and conduct day-to-day business tasks'' (Carne, 2011, P.11).

At the beginning of the emergence of the Internet, many aspects of it were very new and looked unreal, therefore the word 'virtual', and some other combinations of it, such as 'virtual world', 'virtual community', 'virtual reality', 'virtual life', and 'virtual social networks' were used frequently by scholars to describe the Internet (Steuer, 1992; Rheingold, 2000).

To have a clearer understanding of Web 2.0 it is important to know the difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. Green (2010) has described this as:

> Web 1.0 refers to a stage in its evolution when the internet could be used to access information and relatively static web Pages, while Web 2.0 recognises that online environment now offers opportunities for social connection and interactivity for

example, through blogs, wikis and social networking systems and technologies. (Green, 2010, P.4)

Web 2.0 caused a big change in how people used the Internet. Blank and Reisdorf's (2012) definition of Web 2.0 is based on the two dimensions of platform and network effect. They define 'platform' as a reliable technological opportunity, which enables the users to use the platform according to their desire. The 'network effect' is how a platform becomes more valuable when more people use it. For example, an email account is a technological platform, and as more people use it then having an email account becomes more valuable because it becomes possible to be in touch with many people via email. Based on these two factors, they define Web 2.0 as an internet possibility that facilitates the platforms to make online networks.

Stable and fast internet connections, the interactive nature of the Web 2.0, and the expansion of the Internet usage, led some scholars to suggest that the Internet could be considered to be a part of daily life, and not as 'virtual' as it was considered before (Elwell, 2014). Broader bandwidth, permanent connectivity, the possibility of personalised affordances, wireless connection, and globalised connectivity mean that the Internet can have a big effect on the social life, and every study of the Internet users' communication would ideally acknowledge these possibilities, forms of interactions, and communities that the Internet affords. Wellman et al. (2002) argue that because of all these new features of the Internet, traditional and standard forms of social studies and measuring social capital may no longer be applicable because, in this period of time, if people do not connect in a visible way it does not mean they do not interact. According to the *SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, the Internet is the convergence of many media technologies, which makes it multi-dimensional and dynamic.

The concept of convergence means previously separate items join together (Barker, 2004). Jenkins (cited in Dwyer, 2010,P.2), defines convergent media as:

> The flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.

Jenkins argues that the convergence of media depends on the participation of active users. Convergence does not happen via media devices but through the active users' minds and their social interactions (Dwyer, 2010).

The crucial role of the users, their social situation, and group memberships become more relevant if it is considered that different groups have a different understanding of a particular technology or devices (Green, 2010). According to Sterne (1999) researchers should approach the Internet as a place for cultural and social activities or as a field in which the economy, culture, everyday life, and personal experiences play significant roles (Bell, 2006). In addition, DiMaggio et al. (2001), argue that the social effect of the Internet, as a technology, on the social system is related to economics, law and policies about using the Internet. The relationship between users, the Internet, and users' social conditions has attracted many scholars (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; McKnight & Bailey, 1998; Miller & Slater, 2001). According to Green (2010), the situations, desires, and experiences of the Internet users usually influences how they use the Internet. According to Wellman et al. (2002), although Internet use started with young, white, North American men, it spread to the rest of the world, and all ages, genders, and races appropriated the Internet and reshaped their use according to their goals and desires.

1.1.1 Theoretical approaches to the interaction between the Internet and the users

The interaction between the users and the Internet, similar to some other technologies, has been approached in two main ways: 'technological determinism' and 'social shaping of the technology'. Technological determinism considers the Internet as a force of change in the society (Smith & Marx, 1994; Winner, 1993; Scranton, 1995). According to Fuchs (2007), in this approach, the Internet is considered an independent factor, which has a direct effect on the society. These scholars could be optimistic or pessimistic about the influence of the Internet. An optimistic determinist approach could consider the Internet to be 'the technology of freedom', and an innovation which can bring bottom-up democracy in the society; however, other institutions and forces may limit it (Dutton, 2013). Other scholars, such as Sherry Turkle, have a pessimistic view of the Internet and argue that while the Internet connects people it also makes them alone (Turkle, 2017). In general, the claims that utopians make, and the warnings that dystopians give, are based on their understanding of the relationship between the Internet and the existing patterns of culture, media use in a society, and how the Internet either becomes adjusted to these existing patterns or changes the established conditions and encourages new changes (DiMaggio et al., 2001).

Another approach to the Internet is through social shaping of the technology perspective. Social shaping of technology argues that the social context can have an influence on the design and application of a technology (Mackay & Gillespie, 1992; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Williams & Edge, 1996). In the case of the Internet, this approach argues that the Internet's users define its application according to their needs and situation. From this point of view, how a media technology is defined and shaped is tied to the diffusion of the technology and, during the process of the diffusion and shaping, a technology becomes part of people's lives. Studies in sociology, history of technology, organizational studies, and many other fields show a strong connection between constructions of a new technology in a society and

the extent to which that technology is being accepted by the society. These studies show the importance of social context on how a technology diffuses and finds its shape in a society (Boczkowski, 2004).

1.2 Domesticating Online Social Networks and the Importance of the Context

The Internet has enabled its users to create online networks. Making 'Online Social Networks' appeared with Web 2.0 and enabled the Internet users to communicate and share different types of information (Anoosheh, 2013). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as ''a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content'' (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).

For some scholars, the importance of the connection between online social networks and everyday life has been highlighted (Vince & Earnshaw, 1998). However, some scholars preferred to call these online connections 'virtual'. For example, Bakardjieva (2003) describes using online social networks as 'virtual togetherness', a kind of togetherness with a presupposed virtuality. There are many different definitions of 'virtual world', however, using a combination of different definitions, the four essential elements for a virtual world can be described as a synchronous, persistent network of people, represented as avatars, facilitated by networked computers (Bell, 2008).

Online social networking platforms may be popular in a particular region or all over the world. For example, Vkontakte and Renren are two social networking websites which are popular in Russia and China, respectively, while Facebook has more than 2,230 billion monthly active users worldwide (statista.com, 2018). Many scholars have acknowledged the

importance of context on the shape of the Internet and social media in a society. According to Bell (2011) internet users have attempted to adjust the Internet to their lives and domesticate it according to their social context, to make it look like a natural part of their life. Domestication, in general, refers to taming animals, but in the context of studying technologies it is about how a new technology enters into a new household or society and is adjusted to other aspects of life by users, becoming a regular part of the society or household (Pantzar, 1997; Hartmann, 2008; Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). Through domestication, a new technology transforms from a strange and problematic phenomenon to a usual part of life. In fact, during the process of domestication of a technology, it diffuses in a society and converts to a natural part of its users' lifestyles. In the process of domestication, users redefine a new technology according to their conditions. Based on that, studying media in its social context is central to studying the domestication of a medium (Berker et al., 2005).

Qiu (2004) argues that in studying the Internet it is important to study context and setting. Contextual and global factors, as well as how users apply the Internet, are influential factors on the process of diffusion and domestication of the Internet. An important example of the influence of the context on the Internet is how corporations have commercialised the Internet and used it as an advertising tool (Yoon & Kim, 2001).

1.3 Using the Social Networks

Some scholars argue that the 21st century could be called 'the network era' (Serafimovska & Markovik, 2011). Although the term 'social media' can have a technological meaning, social researchers consider it as a techno-social system, which means a technological infrastructure that works in parallel to the social actors (Vespignani, 2009), and they argue that in social studies of the Internet the interaction between users and society always should be considered (Fuchs, 2007).

According to Bell (2006), social studies of social media platforms usually do not follow the technological determinism (Smith & Marx, 1994). As Van Dijck and Poell (2013) argue, since most of the shared content on social media is user-generated, the role of users in shaping these media platforms and their social context is very significant. To assert the importance of the users' culture and conditions in the final form of social media in a society, Castells (2004) argues that social media transfers information to society and the quality of this information is closely linked to the social and cultural conditions.

Many people all over the world have used social media and especially Facebook in specific ways to fulfil their goals. A prominent recent example of using social media is the #MeToo, which is a movement started by actress Alyssa Milano to encourage women to speak up about sexual harassment. In the first forty-eight hours around one million tweets with #MeToo were shared. Very quickly this movement extended around the world and different countries adopted different hashtags according to their language and culture, for example, in France it became #BalanceTonPorc, or #QuellaVoltaChe in Italy (Heimans, 2018). The wide use of social media, particularly Facebook, in the 'Arab Spring' is an outstanding example of the role of social media in politics. In Tunisia, Facebook played a significant role in distributing the news of Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation, mobilizing people to protest, and toppling the established government. Because of the prominent role of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, this movement and some other similar revolutions, such as in Egypt, are called Facebook or Twitter revolutions (Khondker, 2011). Another example is the highlighted role of social media, especially Twitter, during the 2013 protests in Turkey. According to a report by the Social Media and Political Participation Lab at New York University (SMaPP), in one night more than 3,000 tweets per minute were published about the protest in Turkey. On a smaller scale, Moroccan women have used internet technologies to

create a network lobby to improve women's health care and their level of education (Seib, 2007). Another recent wide use of social media happened in the Hong Kong protests called the Umbrella Movement. Studies show how social media had a crucial role in motivating protesters to participate as well as sharing the information (Shen, 2020). In all of these examples, people used these platforms to connect to others with similar interests and goals, share their opinions, and make decisions and plans for their future acts. The application of Facebook as a public sphere, which women used to pass their ideas to the decision-makers and to influence the decisions made in the society, is clearly visible in the example of how Moroccan women used Facebook (Van Dijck, 2012; Valtysson, 2012). In some other examples, such as how Facebook was used in Egypt or Twitter in Turkey, the users applied these social networking platforms to challenge the dominant discourse and political powers.

1.4 The Importance of Studying Social Media and Facebook in Iran and New Zealand

Similar to many other countries, Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms in both Iran and New Zealand, and this thesis examines the influence of political and economic conditions on how students use Facebook in Iran and New Zealand. Although this study is about using Facebook, the influence of social conditions on how people use media in this country has a longer history than just that of Facebook. For example, in the 1979 Iran revolution, which was a political and religious uprising against the Shah of Iran, the role of communication technology was remarkable. The telephone was used along with tape recorders to spread the messages of Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution, who lived in France, all over Iran. The revolutionary leaders recorded these telephone calls and shared them in the form of cassette tapes or Xeroxed papers (Rogers, 2010). Although in recent years, using landline telephones and Xeroxed papers in Iran is not very common, the popularity of using social media and especially Facebook has motivated people to use this

media platform according to their political and economic conditions, to fulfil their goals. One of the outstanding examples of political usages of Facebook in Iran happened during the 2009 uprising, in Iran's 'Green Movement', in which Facebook alongside Twitter was one of the main communication tools in the hands of protesters for planning the protest as well as sharing the news (Wojcieszak & Smith, 2014; Naeli, 2013; Gheytanchi & Rahimi, 2009; Rahimi, 2011). Although after the Green Movement in Iran the government blocked the access to Facebook, some studies show the significant role of this platform in mobilizing people in different elections (Abdolahinejad et al., 2016).

While in Iran the role of Facebook in the people's political behaviour is highlighted, in New Zealand Facebook, along with other social media platforms, plays an important role for social services, especially during natural disasters. A particular use of Facebook in New Zealand happened during the earthquakes in Christchurch in 2010 and 2011 when, according to Dabner (2012), social media and especially Facebook and Twitter played a crucial role as media tools to spread information. Dabner explored the importance of using social media, especially Facebook, by the University of Canterbury, to support the Christchurch community for a long time after the earthquake. Her findings endorse social media as an effective tool in distributing information, especially when it is used purposefully and strategically (Dabner, 2012). In another study, Mersham (2010) studied the role of social media to inform people about a tsunami threat in 2009 in New Zealand. Another very visible use of Facebook in New Zealand is by industries. For example, Forbes et al. (2015) showed that 65% of wineries in New Zealand and Australia were using Facebook and Twitter to be in touch with customers, to share information with them, as well as advertising their products.

1.5 Research Question

The worldwide popularity of Facebook among users with different social, cultural, economic, and political contexts raises an important question about the influence of context on how people use Facebook. Van Dijck (2008, P.4) argues that context is useful for studying a phenomenon in the conditions that surrounded it:

> We use the notion of 'context' whenever we want to indicate that some phenomenon, event, action or discourse needs to be seen or studied in relation to its environment, that is, its 'surrounding' conditions and consequences. We thus not only describe but especially also explain the occurrence or properties of some focal phenomenon in terms of some aspects of its context .

The main question of this study is: How do political and economic conditions in Iran and New Zealand influence how tertiary students use Facebook in these countries?

To answer this question, the study explores three different aspects of the macro- and micro-levels of how people use Facebook in these countries. Different chapters of the study are then devoted to each of the questions below:

- How does the political situation influence how tertiary students use Facebook in Iran and New Zealand?
- How does the economic situation influence how tertiary students use Facebook in Iran and New Zealand?
- How does the interaction between economic conditions, political conditions, and users' needs influence how tertiary students use Facebook in Iran and New Zealand?

1.6 Theories and Key Terms of the Study

Reviewing the research questions highlights some points to address in this study: the influence of politics and the economy on using Facebook; Facebook users' preferences in using Facebook; and the effect of a combination of all these factors. Reviewing the literature identifies the public sphere and political economy as two key theoretical perspectives for understanding social media (Faris & Rahimi, 2015; Couldry, 2012). The political economy approach deals with the relationship between the economy, political power, and the government, as well as the social and cultural activity of the society. The political economy of communication describes the process of producing, distributing and consuming media materials, as well as other services, in modern societies, which are based on consumerism (Durham & Kellner, 2009). This study also draws on the public sphere theoretical approach, defined by Habermas et al. (1974) as a place that is accessible to all social members, in which individual social members participate in discussion and public opinion is formed. Habermas suggests that people who participate in discussions should behave as individuals rather than as business or professional people with special interests. In addition, a public sphere should be free from all forms of legal pressures and limitations.

The study also uses the affordances theory to analyse the effect of Facebook users' preferences on how Facebook is used in Iran and New Zealand. The affordances theory proposes that people encounter and interact with a new device with some presumptions about the function of the device and the purpose of the creation of the device. However, how people use the device is not necessarily what the device was created for. While the features of a device are visible, affordances of the device are unclear, and are related to the people who decide how to apply the device. Affordances of a technology tend to vary for different users (Treem & Leonardi, 2013).

This study connects the major-scale factors of political and economic structure to the minor-scale factors such as the users' preferences, to understand the context of Facebook in a country. It also looks at how users attempt to resist and change the current and dominant standards through Facebook, using Foucauldian discourse analysis. Foucault sees power as something that circulates and functions in the society, as a strategy rather than a possession. According to Mills (2003) in Foucault's view power and knowledge are tied together; they promote and reproduce each other. He argues that people are not the targets of power to be forced but they covey and produce power. Resistance is another side of power. In Foucault's concept of power, people are not powerless against the institutions of government. He argues that power is a legitimate form of interaction between different subjects; however, subjects have the ability to resist these legitimised forms of interaction.

1.7 Why a Comparative Study?

Some scholars argue that studying social media technologies, which afford new communication features such as interactive communication for their users, needs new research paradigms that consider the relationship between the users' situations and social media technologies. According to Atkin et al. (2015), a technology adoption model should consider the interaction between the technology, individuals and the context as the factors that affect the adoption and application of a technology in a society. Some scholars have discussed the influence of users' social conditions on how people use a media technology. For example, Bakardjieva (2005) argues that technology users are not people who only use technologies as completely predefined devices, rather they are conscious about the technology and their needs while they shape the technology to make it suitable for their desires (Bakardjieva, 2005). In addition, Baym (2010b) argues that applications of a technology are shaped through interactions among technologies, users, and institutions. The importance of this view is in considering the users' and social context's influence on the final shape and application of a

technology in a society (Williams & Edge, 1996). Thus, both structure and users have been identified as influential factors on the final shape of a media technology. Green (2010) argues that attempts to manipulate the Internet and shape how people use it are in line with historical challenges including factors such as the government and people that determine the final shape of using the Internet in a society. For example, Qiu (2004) argues that in China, regulation and censorship are virtually the same process, because the government believes that the Internet should be controlled, and there should be no limitation on the government's power. However, the role of the Internet users who apply the Internet in their everyday lives and have personal experiences converting the Internet from an abstract cyberspace to a social construction should be recognised and highlighted (Qiu, 2004). Chiluwa (2012) also mentions the importance of the visible or invisible influence of social, political, and cultural conditions on the construction of a technology in a society. Therefore, to explore the effects of different political and economic conditions on how people use Facebook it is important to analyse and compare using Facebook in at least two countries with noticeable economic and political differences.

1.8 Why Iran and New Zealand?

In comparative studies, usually a small number of cases are chosen (Lijphart, 1971), however, cases should be chosen wisely because choosing different cases may result in different results (Geddes, 1990). Iran and New Zealand are productive cases for comparison because of the obvious contextual differences between the political and economic structures of the countries as well as the evident differences in how Facebook is used in each. In addition, these two countries are accessible to the researcher. The next section is devoted to reviewing some structural factors about Iran and New Zealand.

1.8.1 Basic contextual differences between Iran and New Zealand

The first noticeable differences between Iran and New Zealand, which possibly affect other social and contextual peculiarities of these two countries, are the geography, history, and population, which are reviewed below:

1.8.1.1 A brief history of Iran

As one of the oldest civilisations in the world, the land of Iran has a long history of inhabitation, even before becoming the country known as Iran (Daniel, 2012). The historical and geographical situation of Iran has shaped this country, however, the process of development from a hunting society to a very big civilisation is not very different from other civilisations. Although today Iran is smaller than the ancient Persian Empire, it is still made up of many different ethnicities, languages and religions that are tied together with a very strong sense of national identity. Iran is one of the few countries in that region that has never become colonised, and Iranians are very proud of their nationality and history (Clawson & Rubin, 2005). In the twentieth century, Iran experienced substantial changes in different aspects of its life. The population of the country increased rapidly, and the modernization of its society resulted in a dramatic increase in the urban population as well as in the life expectancy of its people. Many big cities emerged, and the percentage of literate people increased (Abrahamian, 2008). However, one of the most important changes in the twentieth century was in the change in the form of governance. At the beginning of the century the country was ruled by the Shah (king) and some advisors and ministers who did what the Shah ordered. The state governed almost all aspects of society – more than 60% of the national economy, which derived from the income from selling oil, was in the hands of the state, and more than 20% of the economy was in the hands of semi-governmental organizations (Abrahamian, 2008). In the last century, Iran has experienced two revolutions: the 1906-1910 constitutional revolution, and the 1978-1979 Islamic revolution. The Islamic revolution

resulted in the Islamic Republic state, which is still the dominant political system in Iran. In the Islamic Republic, the main source of rules is the 'Twelve Imami shi'ia' interpretation of Islam and all aspects of the society are governed according to this reading of Islam (Nashat, 1980; Amuzegar, 1997; Mehran, 2003). All rules enacted by the parliament must be in harmony with Islamic rules to be legitimate and it is the task of the guardian council to check this compatibility (Schirazi, 1997).

1.8.1.2 A brief history of New Zealand

The history of New Zealand can be traced back to at least 700 years ago when Polynesians reached it by sea and settled. These became Māori and their main relationships were based on kinship and their connection to the land (Wilson, 2006). The first European to arrive in New Zealand was a Dutchman, Abel Tasman, in 1642 (Wilson, 2006). Captain James Cook, a British navigator and explorer, arrived in 1769 and prepared the first map of New Zealand. This was the beginning of regular travel by European traders and missionaries to New Zealand (Liu et al., 1999). In 1840, The Treaty of Waitangi was signed between Maori chiefs and the British Crown, and the British colonial settlement increased in the same year (Smith, 2012). Between 1840 and 1945 many European settlers, mainly from England, Ireland, and Scotland, moved to New Zealand (Phillips, 2013). Apart from Europeans, in the period from 1870 to 1880, many Chinese men came to New Zealand to work in the goldfields in the South Island (Ferguson, 2003). New Zealand became an independent territory in 1907, however, in both World Wars it supported Britain and participated in the war alongside Britain. Despite its short history, New Zealand has always been one of the pioneers in human- and especially women's rights. New Zealand's parliament has enacted very advanced laws like women's suffrage and old-age pensions (Else, 1993).

1.8.1.3 The geography of Iran and New Zealand

Figure 1: Maps of Iran and New Zealand

Iran and New Zealand have some significant differences in their geographical situations. Iran is a Middle-Eastern country in the southwest of Asia. In total, Iran is 1,648,195km^2 and shares common borders with seven countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Turkey. In addition, Iran has maritime borders in the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, and the Caspian Sea (CIA Factbook, 2018). One of the strategic geographical points of Iran is its location at the Hurmuz Channel in the Persian Gulf, which is a crucial pathway for oil transport (Cordesman, 2007). New Zealand is located in Oceania, in the South Pacific Ocean. In total New Zealand is 268,838 km^2. New Zealand has maritime borders, which means having territorial waters which are a particular distance from the coastline, with its neighbours being American Samoa (United States), Australia, Fiji, French Polynesia (France), Kiribati, Samoa, and Tonga (CIA Factbook, 2018). New Zealand includes two main islands plus several smaller islands. Iran has a population of 82,021,564 (July 2017 est.) with the median age being 30.3 years, while New Zealand has a population of 4,510,327 (July 2017 est.) with the median age being 37.9 years (CIA Factbook, 2018). It can be seen that Iran is located in one of the politically most turbulent regions of the world, the Middle East, and is

more than six times bigger than New Zealand, with a population which is 18 times larger than New Zealand's.

1.8.1.4 Contextual facts about Iran and New Zealand

In terms of population and culture some other differences between Iran and New Zealand are distinguishable. In Iran, 98% of people believe in Islamic values, which have a great influence on their daily lives (Infoplease, 2018). The remaining two per cent belong to other religions such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and other religions. In New Zealand the distribution of religions is different: Anglican 15%, Roman Catholic 12%, Presbyterian 11%, Methodist 3%, Pentecostal 2%, Baptist 1%, other Christian 9%, and none 26 %. Therefore, in contrast to Iran, New Zealand does not have a dominant religious value system.

Iran's population is younger than New Zealand's, as people between 25-29 create the largest age group in the country, while in New Zealand people between 45-54 are the largest age group (CIAFactbook, 2018). Compared to Iran, a larger portion of the New Zealand society is urbanised, however, urbanization in Iran is developing. The statistics show that the percentage of urbanization in New Zealand has not experienced a notable change during 2000-2015 (Theglobaleconomy.com). The graphs below depict the comparison of some important social indexes between Iran and New Zealand. These indexes have been made by Hofstede Insights to gauge the cultural characteristics of different societies. The index of individualism indicates to what extent people in a society are expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families rather that a bigger network of people around them (hofstede-insights.com, 2018).

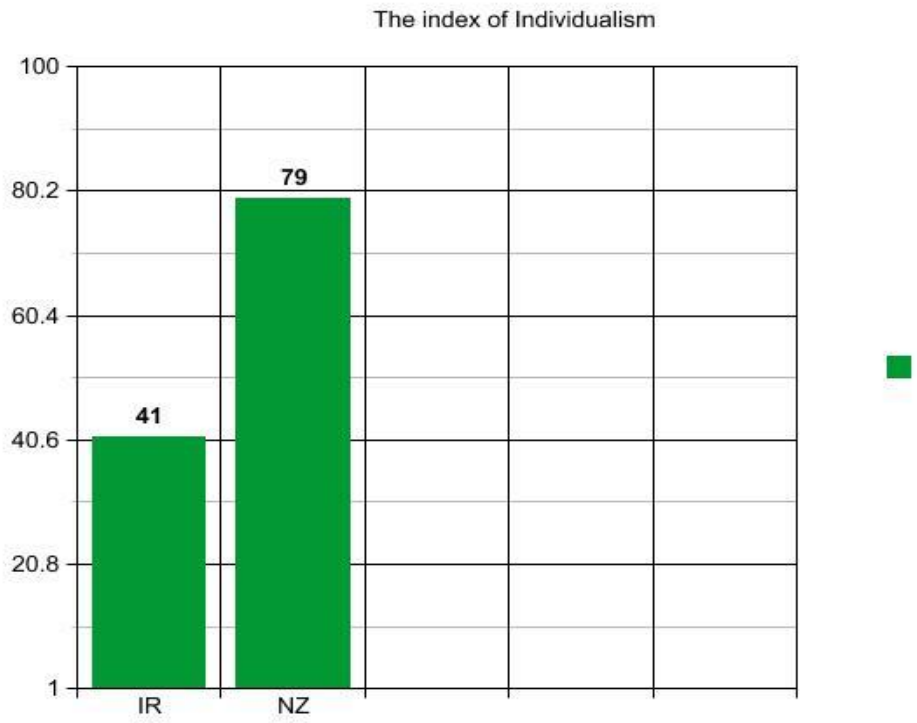


Figure 2: Comparison of the indexes of individualism of Iran and New Zealand

The index of rule of law shows the power of law in a society and how much people of a country follow the law and pay attention to it (hofstede-insights.com, 2018).

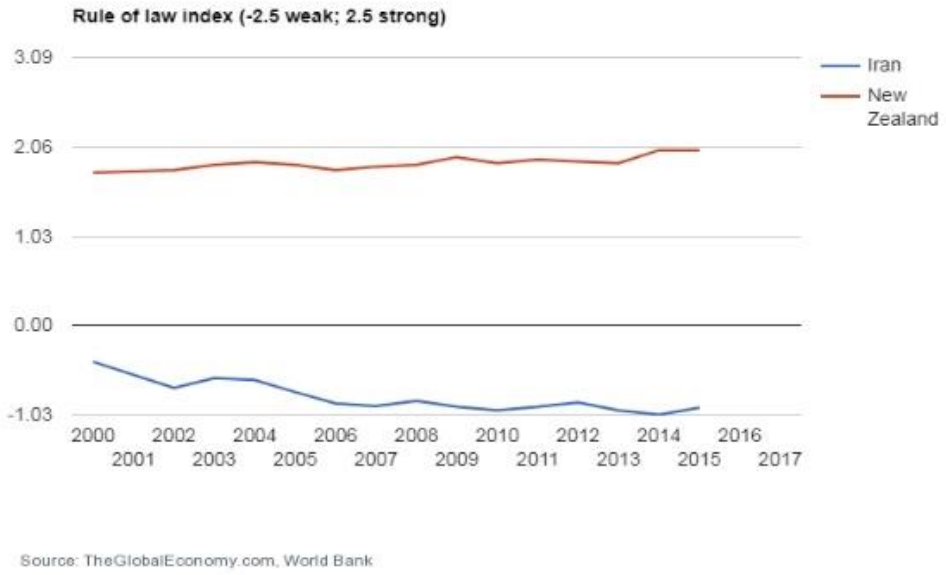


Figure 3: Comparison of the rule of law index of Iran and New Zealand

1.8.1.5 Economic facts

With regards to economics, according to the World Bank's records, the Gross National Income (GNI) in 2016 was $38,750 (USD) in New Zealand, and $5,470 (USD) in Iran (https://data.worldbank.org/, 2018). The graph below demonstrates the comparison of the index of globalisation of the economy in Iran and New Zealand

The website *Theglobaleconomy.com* (2018a) defines the index of globalisation of an economy as:

> Economic globalisation has two dimensions: actual economic flows and restrictions to trade and capital. The sub-index on actual economic flows includes data on trade, FDI, and portfolio investment. The sub-index on restrictions considers hidden import barriers, mean tariff rates, taxes on international trade (as a share of current revenue), and an index of capital controls.

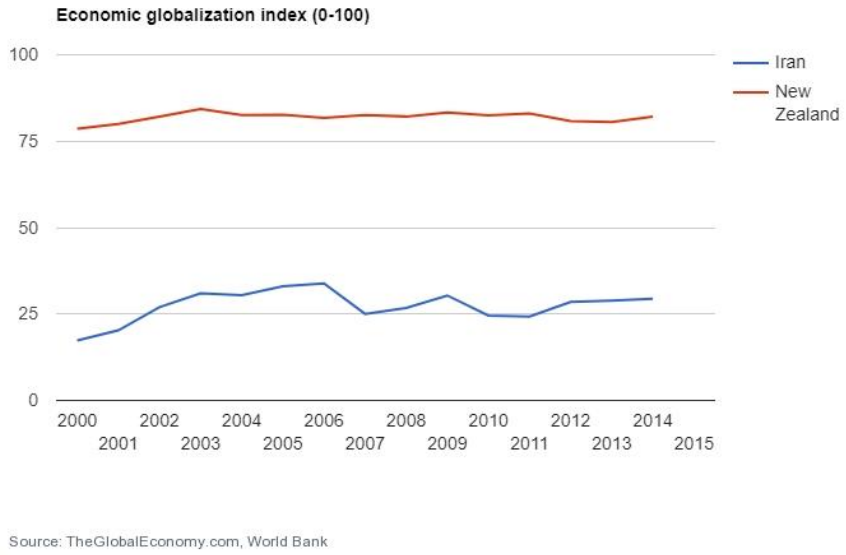


Figure 4: Comparison of the economic globalisation indexes of Iran and New Zealand

The graph below shows the percentage of people over 15 who own credit cards in Iran and New Zealand

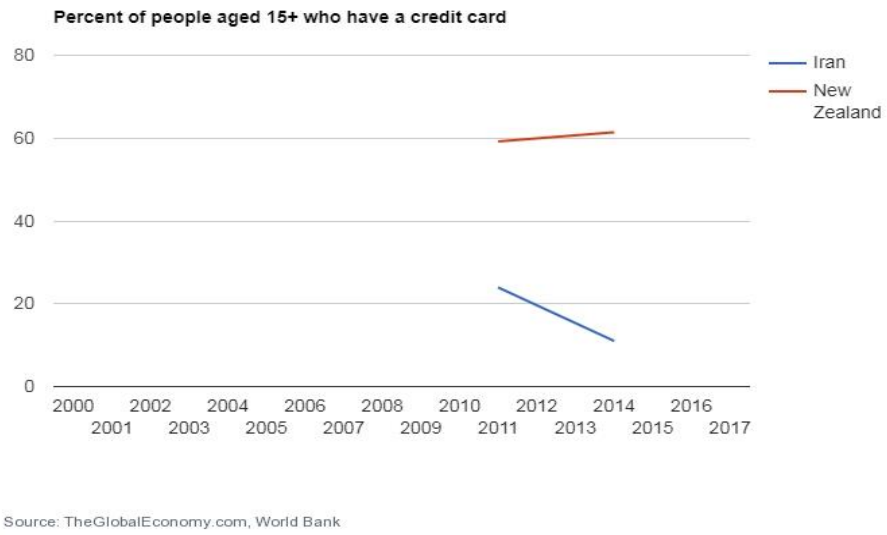


Figure 5: Comparison between the percentage of 15+ people who own credit cards in Iran and New Zealand

1.8.1.6 Political facts

While Iran's political system is the Islamic Republic, in which Islamic rules have a significant influence on policy, in New Zealand the political system is based on human rights and freedom, and it respects individual rights, individual effort, individual freedom, as well as the free market (The Human Rights Act, 1993). In liberal societies, usually the state does not meddle, or restrict people from following their own desires, nor does it limit their freedom of speech (Mossberger et al., 2007). The graph below shows the indexes of 'voice of accountability' for Iran and New Zealand. This index indicates the effectiveness of people's opinions in making decisions in the country.

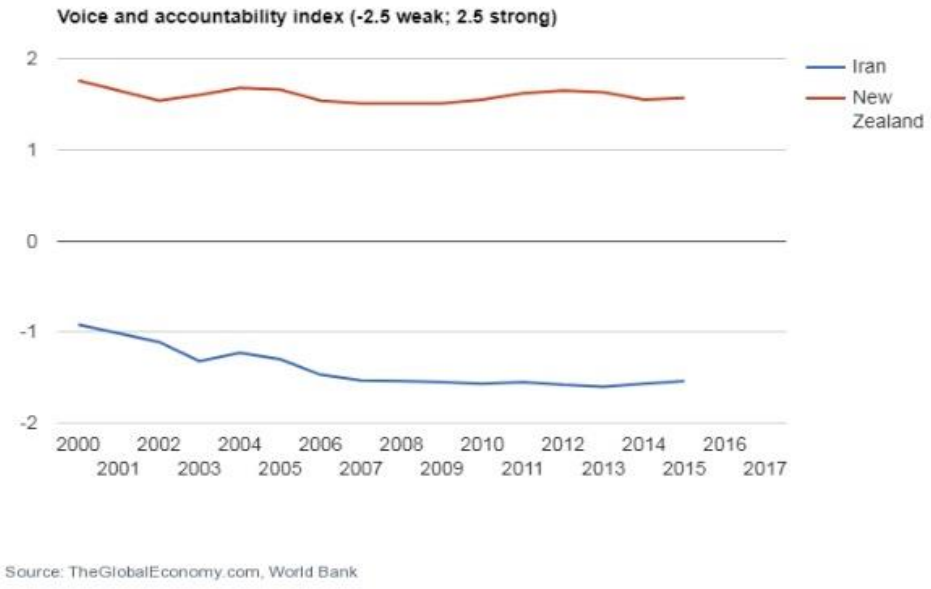


Figure 6: Comparison of the indexes of voice and accountability for Iran and New Zealand (Theglobaleconomy.com, 2018a)

The graph below represents the rankings of Iran and New Zealand in terms of press freedom.

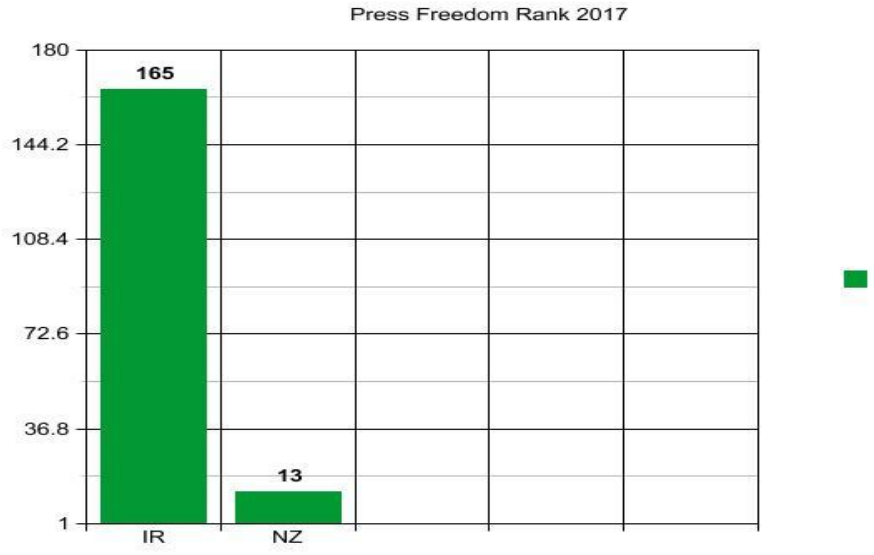


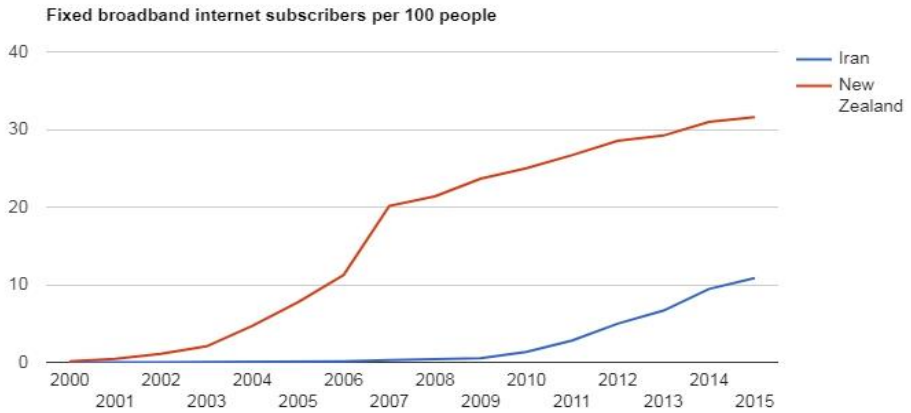
Figure 7: Comparison of press freedom rankings for Iran and New Zealand (https://rsf.org/en/, 2018).

1.8.1.7 Access to the Internet and Facebook

Access to the Internet and Facebook differs between New Zealand and Iran. In New Zealand, using Facebook, similar to other websites, is free of limitations. In Iran, having a Facebook

account is not in itself against the law, however, the Facebook website is blocked by the government. Facebook users need to use a 'Virtual Private Network' (VPN) or other type of anti-filter software to access the website, and using a VPN or anti-filter software is illegal. This means that although having a Facebook account is not illegal, using Facebook requires breaking the law to bypass the Facebook blockage in the country. Despite blocking, many Iranians do use Facebook, indicating that filtering Facebook has been an unsuccessful experience in Iran. According to the website *internetworldstats.com*, at the end of December 2017, Iran had more than 40 million Facebook users (internetworldstats, 2018), which is a considerable number for a country where the government has blocked Facebook. Also, according to *stuff.co.nz*, in 2017 more than 2.9 million New Zealanders, 61% of the country's population, declared Facebook as their second-most attractive leisure activity (stuff.co.nz, 2017).

The graphs below demonstrate comparisons of some structural differences between Iran and New Zealand in terms of accessing the Internet. This graph shows the number of broadband subscribers in both Iran and New Zealand. As is depicted here, the countries are very different, however, an increase in the number of broadband internet users in Iran is clear.



Source: TheGlobalEconomy.com, World Bank

Figure 8: Comparison of broadband users in Iran and New Zealand

The graph below represents a comparison of the Internet bandwidths in Iran and New Zealand. It is obvious from the graph that while the Internet bandwidth in New Zealand is increasing rapidly, In Iran it is increasing very slowly.

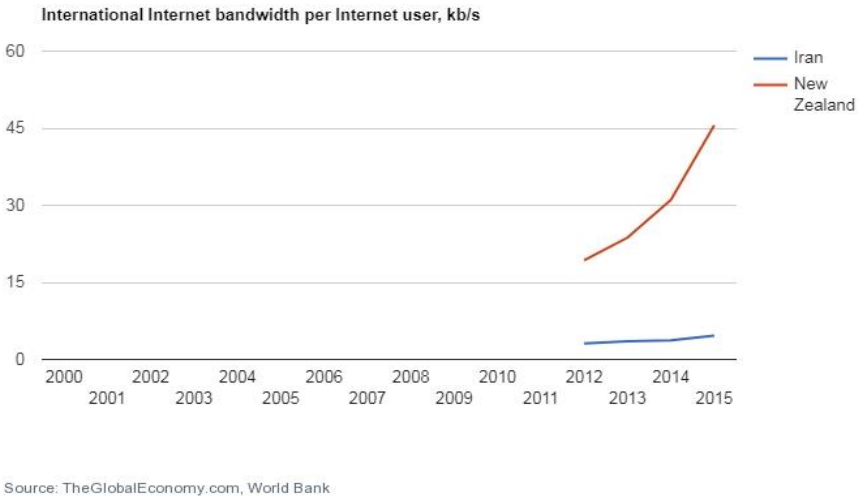


Figure 9: Comparison of Internet bandwidths in Iran and New Zealand

Figures 8 and 9 show that the Internet is more accessible in New Zealand and also the speed of the Internet in New Zealand is much higher than the Internet in Iran. These factors could influence using social media, which is an internet-based service. In each of the comparisons between the two countries, it is possible to present some more details to show the differences or similarities between the countries. The graphs and statistics presented here illustrate the big picture of Iran and New Zealand; however, in future chapters more detailed statistics will be presented.

1.8.2 The different usages of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand

A brief review of studies on Facebook in Iran and New Zealand reveals a clear difference in the importance of Facebook in both countries. Studies on Facebook in New Zealand cover subjects ranging across natural disasters, social education, marketing, and Facebook usage

covers different aspects of everyday life such as music and education (Vandevijvere et al., 2018; Hoksbergen & Insch, 2016; Anikeeva et al., 2015; Mansfield et al., 2011). In Iran, studies on Facebook mainly focus on topics such as the user's identity or politics (Khonsari et al., 2010; KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014). In general, research on Facebook in New Zealand covers more fields and topics than in Iran. More details about the previous studies of using Facebook in Iran and New Zealand are discussed in the next chapter, which is dedicated to the review of the existing literature on studying social media, and specifically Facebook.

1.9 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of seven chapters as below:

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis. It establishes key topics such as the importance of the study and how this study contributes to the academic studies of social media, sets out the main research question and objectives, the key terms of the study, and gives a brief explanation of the theoretical framework of the study as well as the research strategy.

Chapter 2, the literature review, is devoted to the review of some studies on the Internet, social media and especially Facebook in Iran and New Zealand.

Chapter 3 sets out the theoretical approaches used to answer the research questions, which are introduced and combined to form the theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter 4, methodology, outlines the research strategy, including the sampling, data collection and analysis techniques used in this study.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the analysis of the political economy of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand.

Chapter 6 presents the results of analysing the use of Facebook as a public sphere in Iran and New Zealand. This chapter compares the quantity and quality of Facebook users' online communication in Iran and New Zealand.

Chapter 7 presents the results of analysing Facebook as a place in which different discourses are being presented and compete. This chapter also shows the role of Facebook in resistance against the dominant discourses in Iran and New Zealand.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion. This chapter presents a summary of all findings of the study and attempts to make sense of the different analyses, and combines all the findings to present one possible answer to the research question.

2 Literature Review

The literature review of this study can be divided into two parts: First, this chapter discusses some of the studies on Facebook around the world to become familiar with the Facebook research trends, and identifying the importance and necessity of a comparative study. Secondly, it reviews the previous studies on Facebook and social media in Iran and New Zealand to find the appropriate theoretical and methodological perspectives for this study.

2.1 Common Topics in Studying the Use of Facebook

Different aspects of using Facebook have attracted many scholars from all over the world. Privacy on Facebook has been a focal point of many studies (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Govani & Pashley, 2005; Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Jones & Soltren, 2005). Other popular research topics about Facebook are: users' online identity construction or researching users' profiles (Zhao et al., 2008; Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Joinson, 2008); time spent on Facebook (Pempek et al., 2009; Junco, 2012); information disclosure (Tow et al., 2010, Mazer et al., 2009); different effects of using Facebook on users (Pempek et al., 2009; Small, 2008); satisfaction or dissatisfaction with using Facebook (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Park et al., 2009). Most of these topics relate to individual Facebook users and analyse them as individuals without being concerned with their membership in different social groups. These individual users decide and behave personally, and their decisions and online behaviour are not considered in the context of their social conditions or their membership in a specific social group. Many different approaches and definitions of a social group have been presented. Reicher (1982) defines a group as at least two people who have a common social identification and consider themselves as a member of the same social category. Mullen and Goethals (2012) have attempted to identify the most common introductory characteristics of a social group. They argue that in most definitions of the social group, scholars have addressed such factors as social categorization,

social rewards, interaction and interdependence, and having an influence on each other, as important factors that shape a social group. If we consider that Facebook users are already members of different social groups and these memberships can affect their use of Facebook, then based on the influence of their memberships on how they use Facebook, in general there are three categories of social studies of Facebook users, which are recognizable. First, studies which assess Facebook users either as one homogeneous group; secondly, studies that consider Facebook users as members of more than one social group based on demographic factors such as gender or age; and thirdly, studies that consider Facebook users as members of different socio-cultural groups.

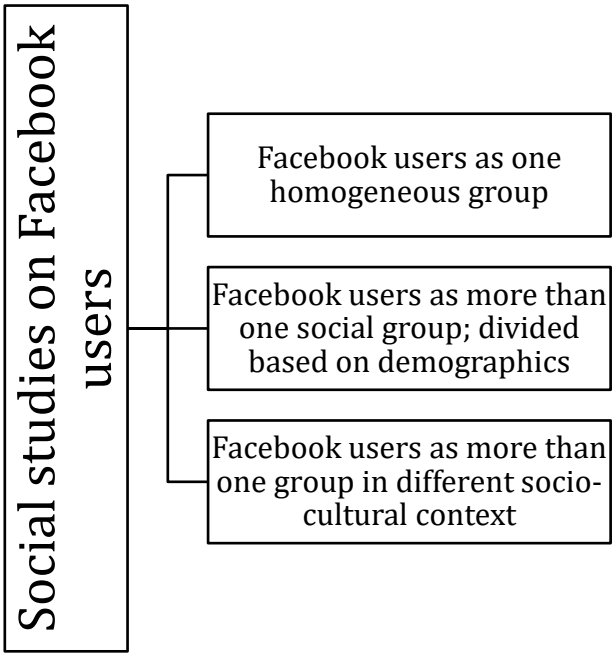


Figure 10: The classification of social studies on Facebook users

2.1.1 Social studies on Facebook users as one group

In early scholarship on Facebook users, most researchers considered Facebook users as individuals whose use of Facebook is not affected by their social conditions. Foregger (2008), for example, studied what motivated undergraduate students' use of Facebook and found nine factors: passing the time, connection, sexual attraction, utilities and upkeep,

establishing/maintaining old ties, accumulation, social comparison, channel use, and networking. In another study, Selwyn (2009) explored the extent to which students use Facebook for educational purposes. He analysed the Facebook wall activities of 909 undergraduate students in the UK. The results showed that instead of thinking about the importance of Facebook in improving or deteriorating students' official studies, Facebook has to be considered as an element of what he calls the ''identity politics'' (2009:171) of being a student, as Facebook helps students to deal with their role conflicts with other people around them, for example, academic staff. Abdollahian and Kermani (2013) endeavoured to make a scale to measure the social capital of Iranian Facebook users. They applied participant observation as a data collection method and studied 14 users' behaviour on Facebook. Then, they used an online questionnaire to survey 218 Iranian Facebook users. As a result of the study, the researchers used a ten-point scale to measure the social capital of Iranian Facebook users. The results show that, unlike everyday life, the number of different Facebook groups to which a user belongs has no effect on their social capital. This is possible because Facebook users are unlikely to know the creator or other members of a page that they like. Adlipour et al. (2014) studied the effect of using Facebook on the cultural identity of Iranian youth in the city of Isfahan. They surveyed a sample of 424 people using an online questionnaire. The results showed that there is an inverse relationship between how much the participants use and are active on Facebook, and their cultural identity. In other words, as a user's activity on Facebook increases, the user's cultural identity decreases. In a study on Facebook use in New Zealand, Niland et al. (2015:123) studied how young adults practise friendship on Facebook. They chose 51 young adults, aged 18-25 years, and found they understand their Facebook friendships through 'fun times together, investment, protection, and self-authority' .

In the above studies, researchers aimed to understand Facebook users as a coherent group of individuals apart from their context or social group. That is, they did not discuss the cultural and social contexts of users or their social belongings as formative factors in how people use Facebook.

2.1.2 Social studies on Facebook users among more than one group with the same social context

Some other studies consider Facebook users as a group of people, rather than individuals, who usually are defined by their demographic, or other personal traits such as age, gender, job, psychological profiles, and other characteristics. For example, Roblyer et al. (2010) compared understandings of Facebook and reasons for using it among college faculty and students at a mid-sized southern university in the U.S. They found that compared to academic staff, students were more likely to use Facebook. In addition, students were significantly more interested in using Facebook for educational purposes than faculty members. In another study, McAndrew and Jeong (2012) showed that age, gender, and relationship status are the main factors that can predict the behaviour of Facebook users. In this study, the researchers surveyed a sample of 284 males and 735 females, using an online questionnaire. The researchers made a Facebook-event invitation and sent it to students and staff at a Liberal Arts College in the American Midwest via e-mail. They also used some 'social psychology networks' to find participants. The results showed that how people use Facebook differs between different social groups. For example, compared to male users, female users spent more time, made more online friends, and were more likely to use photos to impress their audiences. Factors such as psychological factors have also been examined in several studies. For instance, Ross et al. (2009) explored the connection between personality and Facebook use. The results showed that personality characteristics did not have a significant effect on

how people use Facebook, however, in the earlier literature personality was mentioned as an influential factor in using Facebook.

2.1.3 Social studies on Facebook users among more than one group in different socio-cultural contexts

Although, compared with the other categories, examining the influence of social context on using Facebook has received less attention from scholars, some works in this field are noteworthy. A cross-national study on Facebook users by Almansa et al. (2013) examined how young people in Colombia and Spain used Facebook to communicate, and what their experiences were of using Facebook as a communication tool. The researchers applied a content analysis method and found similar reasons that those two groups' members had to use Facebook. The need to be a member of a network and presenting themselves in a way that they think is original, were the main reasons for using Facebook of the studied groups. The study also found that the young people manipulate language, developing a kind of personal language that reshapes the main language. This echoes the findings of Jarvandi and Forghani (2010) about how Internet users choose nicknames to enter chat rooms, often by changing a regular word to emphasise the desired aspect of their personality. For example, users write the word 'wolf' as 'woollf' to put stress on being a wolf and to highlight the characteristics of being a wolf.

Although cross-national research on using social media requires considerable time and financial resources, as well as more complicated sampling and research methods, the effect of political conditions on using Facebook has been studied by Chan and Guo (2013). They studied Facebook use in Hong Kong and the US, to compare the relationship between using Facebook and participating in political activities, and the association with political efficacy in a well-established democracy (U.S.A) and a democracy in its transitional stage (Hong Kong).

The findings demonstrated a strong association between using Facebook and political and civic participation. The study indicated that social media could improve participation in politics or civic actions in different cultures, especially for people who find themselves not able to understand or engage in political subjects in other ways. For these users, Facebook acts as an information source.

In a comparative study of Iranian and American students, Kia and Nouri Moradabadi (2012) looked at motivations for joining Facebook. They assessed American students' motivations through a review of previous studies, and from that review they developed a survey for researching Iranian students. The literature found that American students join Facebook to create new relationships, keep old relationships, and look for new information and entertainment. In contrast, the Iranian students identified sharing information and news, having freedom of communication, freedom of information, the ability to control personal data, and equality as their main reasons for using Facebook. Another study by Kim et al. (2011) explored how cultural context can shape the use of communication technology, by surveying college students in the U.S and Korea. The results showed that the main motivations for using social networking websites are similar between the two groups studied, although the way they ranked the importance of these motives could be different.

Reviewing the existing literature on cross-national studies on Facebook reveals that the effect of politics and economic conditions in a society on how people use Facebook has been sufficiently researched, however it is not easy to find comparative studies which explore the influence of political and economic conditions in different countries on how people use Facebook. In New Zealand, although a few studies on using Facebook in New Zealand and

Australia are detectable, it is not easy to find comparative studies which acknowledge the effect of social context as an influential factor on how people use Facebook.

2.2 Studying Facebook in Iran and New Zealand

Reviewing previous studies on Facebook in Iran and New Zealand demonstrates some differences in Facebook research interests in these countries. The first difference refers to the quantity of these studies: it seems the number of studies on using Facebook in Iran is more than that of studies on New Zealand, which can be related to the higher number of universities and researchers in Iran than New Zealand. Apart from the quantity of studies on Facebook, the topics studied in Iran and New Zealand also reflect significant differences. While notable topics in Facebook studies in Iran are about the political usage of Facebook, or how using Facebook influences youth values and identity, in New Zealand topics such as using Facebook to spread information during natural catastrophes, Facebook use by politicians or political parties, or by industries, have received more attention.

In Iran, the effect of using the Internet and social media on the users' values and identities has been one of the most highlighted research topics in this field (Saei & Vatani, 2016; Rezaei et al., 2015; Afshar et al., 2016). In a study, Ziviar et al. (2018) researched the relationship between using Facebook and Telegram, and how Iranian users protect their national and historical identity, which originates from ancient Iranian civilization. The researchers surveyed 100 users and the results showed that seven per cent of respondents believed that they did not need any form of national or civilisation identity. Those respondents acknowledged the requirement of a combination of their national and civilisation identity with the demands of the new atmosphere of the globalisation era. Seventy per cent of the respondents, while accepting a mixed identity perspective, had answered that although they considered their Iranian national identity, they asserted that they had to accept the demands

and requirements of globalisation as well. They said that they had to acknowledge the Persian language, civilisation, and Persian culture as well as the globalisation, and 23% of respondents had answered that their national identity or Persian culture is more important than the globalised culture.

In fact, many Facebook studies that investigate the influence of using Facebook on the users' values or the Islamic identity of Iranians, have explored the relationship between using Facebook and Islamic discourse. For example, in an article 'The role of Internet in social problems, and cyberspace as the battlefield for soft war (cultural war),' Abbasi and Hashemi (2011) argued that the Internet can be harmful to the society in different ways, such as using the Internet for spying, reducing the power of security systems in the country, the inappropriate educational role of the internet – such as teaching people about terrorism or how to use drugs, or introducing unacceptable alternative discourses. In addition, it can create problems in political aspects such as people being able to create virtual political groups, or it can disrupt the government's control over political information. The Internet also can introduce harmful ideas, such as 'enemy'; the word 'enemy', in the Iranian governmental literature, usually refers to western ideas and lifestyle. The Internet also prepares an infrastructure for cultural invasion and helps to transfer the western norms and values, as well as critical challenges in religious and moral values. As a result, the writers are concerned about different elements of political domination such as controlling the information flow and protecting the dominant discourse from the invasion of western values. In another study, Razavi et al. (2018) have done a study titled 'Exploring the relationship between media literacy and (western) cultural invasion in social media.' 'Cultural invasion', in Iran, is a key phrase which is presented by the supreme leader and refers to the invasion of western culture and norms against Islamic values and culture, which mostly happens through media, and its

goal is transforming the Islamic culture and values to western values, therefore he believes that everybody, especially the government, must be careful to stop this invasion (sayyidali.com, 2020).

The researchers studied the influence of the application of Instagram on users. They surveyed 435 people, who were chosen using a non-random sampling method, with a questionnaire. The study showed that there was an inverse relationship between age and cultural invasion, which means that young people were more influenced by Instagram to accept western values. The researchers argue that Instagram is a very harmful social-media application for the minds of young people because of its role in changing youths' tastes, introducing the non-Islamic and western values and lifestyle to the Iranian youth, and consequently Instagram causes cultural invasion. The big time-gap between these two mentioned studies (Razavi et al., 2018; Abbasi & Hashemi, 2011) reveals that during that time the panic about the Internet and social media has not significantly reduced among some Iranian scholars who are concerned about protecting the dominant discourse in the country. These scholars, in parallel with many decision makers, see the Internet and social media as an enemy, which is being used by their enemies to invade the Islamic cultural system.

The effect of using social media on the users' cultural values or lifestyle has also been studied in New Zealand, however, many of these studies are on how using social media could help immigrants from different cultural backgrounds to cope with the New Zealand culture. For example, in a study, Du and Lin (2019) researched the role of using social media in the acculturation and wellbeing of Chinese in New Zealand. They surveyed 121 Chinese in New Zealand, and the study revealed a direct correlation between using social media, which is popular in New Zealand, and the sense of identification with New Zealand, and an inverse

correlation with Chinese identity. In another research paper named ‘Identity production on social media: the narrative of second-generation youth of Sinhalese Sri Lankan origin in New Zealand,’ the researcher argues that, in this qualitative study, research participants had used three strategies to represent themselves: using graphics or visual materials, using textual materials, and membership in a group. The researcher argues that the participants moved back and forth between their New Zealand and Sri Lankan identities (Handapangoda, 2015).

Comparing the topics of these studies on the influence of social media on users’ culture or identity indicated the influence of the social contexts of Iran and New Zealand on how scholars approach social media in these countries. For example, whereas in Iran, protecting Islamic values as the base of the political system is highlighted, in New Zealand, immigration and the integration of immigrants into society are important issues.

Apart from the dominant discourse, culture or identity, the topic which has received the most attention from Iranian researchers is the relationship between using social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, and the users’ political behaviour (Abdollahyan & Kermani, 2016; Talebi & Najafpour, 2016; Habib Zadeh & Bakhshi, 2017). For example, Abdolahinejad et al. (2016) presented a study titled ‘The influence of using Facebook on students’ election behaviour in the 2014 presidential election in Iran.’ The 2014 presidential election in Iran was important because this election took place after the suppression of the Green Movement by the government, and many people who supported the Green Movement believed that they should not participate in the election. The researchers argue that because of the lack of access to the mass media, which is under the government’s control, the only place to talk about this topic was Facebook, as a place to criticise the presented narrative of the formal media in Iran. Although the government had blocked Facebook, this social media showed a strong

effectiveness in shaping people's minds. The study shows that Facebook users, by sharing the opinions of famous and usually non-politician influencers, played a significant role in shaping the users' minds. This study showed the effectiveness of Facebook on the political behaviour of Iranians; however, the researchers suggest that to understand the importance of Facebook we need to understand the relationship between Facebook and the political conditions in the country.

In other research Aghili et al. (2018) studied the role of social media in elections in Iran and how these social media can affect the mass media. They used the Delphi method for the study. First, they interviewed some experts using a deep interview method. Then the researchers extracted some items from the interviews and presented the items to the experts to ask their opinion about them. They repeated this process until the theoretical saturation had been achieved. The results of the study showed that the experts believed social media provide a more pluralistic atmosphere compared to formal mass media; also, social media gives a voice to some groups that do not have a chance to easily present their ideas in the society. In addition, social media can play the role of a Habermasian public sphere in a society. The experts argued that some problems of social media, such as lack of credibility or being more a distributer rather than a producer, would be resolved gradually.

The political influence of using social media has been studied in New Zealand also, however, New Zealand scholars have been more concerned with how politicians use social media than how the people use it. For example, Ross et al. (2015) researched 1,114 Facebook wall posts from New Zealand members of parliament (MPs) leading up to the 2011 general election. They found that during the research period women had posted more than men, and also Labour MPs had posted more than National MPs. Also, most politicians rarely engaged in a

dialogue with other users and preferred a monologue to a dialogue. So, they preferred using Facebook as a tool to spread their message rather than as a tool to have an interactive communication with other users.

In another study, to investigate the role of social media in politics Cameron et al. (2016) used the data from Facebook and Twitter on the 2011 New Zealand general election to evaluate the accuracy of social media as a predictor of election results. They concluded that there was a significant statistical relationship between online networks' size and election results, although they argue that this effect is not very big and social media can work as a predictor in very close contests.

As shown, scholars in both Iran and New Zealand have dealt with the influence of social media on politics, however they take different standpoints: Iranian scholars have shown more interest in the social media as a public sphere and as an alternative media that people could use to overcome the political barriers to have a voice in society, whereas in New Zealand, how politicians and political parties have used social media to reach people and spread their opinions has attracted more researchers.

The motivations of people for using social media, as well as the functions of social media in Iran, have been the other topics which have attracted the Iranian researchers frequently (Zolqadr & Qasemzadeh Araqi, 2014; Moradi et al., 2014). One of the important functions of social media in Iran is for the accessing of news and information. This function of social media, as well as the relationship between social media and formal media, which is controlled by the government, has received Iranian scholars' attentions and there are some studies on that

(Jahromi, 2014; Saadat, 2014; Ismailian, 2016; Emami, 2014). This function of social media of spreading information has also attracted some New Zealand researchers.

In a study Ferguson et al. (2014) examined the role of Twitter as a tool to share information at the 61st Annual Scientific Meeting of the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand. During the meeting they monitored and analysed tweets with the hashtag #CSANZ2013. Their study was focused on identifying the influencers' latest tweets, the statistics of tweets, and the comparison of activities during the conference. They analysed 669 tweets from 107 unique accounts, which meant nine tweets per hour and six tweets per participant. They argue that this amount of Twitter use highlights the importance of this social media for scientists.

Some researchers in New Zealand have explored using social media for spreading the information in natural disasters. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in an article, Nicki Dabner explored the importance of using social media, especially Facebook, by the University of Canterbury to support the Christchurch community for a long time after the earthquakes in this city. Her findings endorse social media as an effective tool in distributing information, especially when it is used purposefully and strategically (Dabner, 2012). In another study, Gary Mersham analysed the role of social media in informing people about a tsunami threat in 2009 in New Zealand, and the findings revealed the increasing importance of social media in warning people about natural disasters, however, formal organizations were concerned about the accuracy of the shared data on these platforms (Mersham, 2010). Although Iran often suffers from natural disasters, and it seems that social media plays an important role after these natural catastrophes, this topic still has not received much attention from Iranian researchers.

In New Zealand the relationship between social media and the economy is very marked and some researchers have explored this relationship. For example, Richard and Guppy (2014), from Victoria University in New Zealand, studied the influence of Facebook on the purchasing behaviour of users. They surveyed 210 Facebook users and the results revealed a positive correlation between the Facebook 'like button' and 'location-based check-in service' and users' purchasing behaviours (Richard & Guppy, 2014). But in Iran there are few studies on the relationship between social media and the economy.

Reviewing the previous studies on Facebook in Iran and New Zealand suggested a few points. First, the issue of identity has been approached in two different ways. While in New Zealand, studies generally suggest that social media establishes the New Zealand national identity among the users, in Iran there is a concern that using social media can harm the national or religious identity of the users. In terms of political usage of social media, it can be seen that the main focus is on how people use social media to compensate for the limited ability to express their ideas, and the use of social media as a public sphere in Iran is highlighted, while in New Zealand the majority of studies are focused on how politicians use the ability of social media to reach the audience and spread their message.

Another important topic is the study of social media, especially Facebook, in a society as it relates to the relationship between social media and the dominant discourse in Iran. Usually, scholars consider these two discourses as being opposed to each other, while in New Zealand the comparison between the dominant discourse in the country and alternative discourses introduced on social media has not grabbed researchers' attention significantly. On the other hand, how different industries and social groups use social media has received much attention from New Zealand scholarship (Howison et al., 2015; Whiddett et al., 2012; Neilson, 2018).

In terms of the variety of research topics on social media in Iran and New Zealand, reviewing the previous studies shows that in Iran studies on social media are usually concentrated around several topics such as identity, discourse, political behaviour, and social capital, while in New Zealand a wider range of topics such as using social media in marketing, or the use of social media by different social groups or organizations, have been researched by scholars (Neo & Calvert, 2012; Parackal et al., 2017; Mueller et al., 2014). In addition, in-depth interviews, content analysis, and questionnaires have been used as the most common research methods to study social media in Iran and New Zealand.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Internet and Context

Contextual conditions or social structures usually have an influence on people's behaviour and this influence of social structure or contextual conditions has attracted many scholars (Giddens, 1984; Hurrelmann, 1988; Archer, 2003, Bourdieu & Nice, 1977). In the case of how people use social media according to these conditions, there are many highlighted examples of different groups of people around the world who have applied social media platforms according to their contextual conditions to achieve their collective goals. Using online social networks in China in disregard of the government's desire (Scotton & Hachten, 2010); Arab Spring movements and their government's reaction of restricting the vast use of social media (Khondker, 2011); and the 2013 protests in Turkey (Kuymulu, 2013) and how the Turkish government attempted to control social media, are some prominent examples of how people used different social media platforms to fulfil their goals. The role and influence of contextual conditions in all of the mentioned examples is very significant. Hence, these examples reflect the importance of the contextual conditions on the use of social media, especially Facebook, by people.

Among all possible contextual factors, the influence of such social factors as politics and culture have attracted some scholars and there are studies that examine the effect of these contextual variables on how people use social media (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Carter, 2013; Vorvoreanu, 2009). However, in the majority of these studies, analysing how different groups of people use social media remains at a descriptive analysis level, and an analytical explanation of the influence of contextual conditions on how people use social media has rarely been presented. This study has been designed to analyse how political and economic

conditions influence people's use of Facebook. Then, this study looks at the politics and economic conditions of a society and the large-scale influential factors which can affect how the people of that society use Facebook. To design the theoretical framework and choose a proper research method for answering the research question this work draws on previous studies of Facebook users.

3.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The review of the literature, as well as the topic of the study, suggest that an appropriate theoretical framework for this study should consist of suitable theoretical approaches, from connecting and analysing the structural or macro-level factors, such as economic and political conditions, to the micro level, or how individuals use Facebook.

Several theoretical approaches have been suggested and used by other scholars to study the Internet and social media at macro and micro levels, such as the political economy and public sphere. To study social media in Iran, Faris and Rahimi (2015) have used both the political economy and the public sphere to study the relationship between the social media and the government or other organizations in Iran. But to enrich the theoretical framework of this study, affordances and discourse analysis will be added to its theoretical framework. In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the issue of discourse and the competition between different presented discourses on Facebook are very prominent concerns among Iranian scholars and decision makers. Therefore, analysing Facebook through a theoretical discourse approach could be very helpful for this research. According to Manokha (2009) political economy and Foucauldian discourse analysis can complement each other because the political economy helps to connect the issue of power, which is the focal point of Foucauldian discourse to the economy (2009). In general, the reasons behind choosing these theoretical approaches as the main elements of the theoretical elements of this study can be explained

thus: While a political economy approach is useful for understanding how large-scale factors such as organizations, governments, politicians, or celebrities deal with Facebook in different countries, a public sphere approach, especially using Habermas's Communicative Action theory, helps to analyse the mechanism of interactions between Facebook users and connect these interactions to the political conditions. The potential of the Internet and its usage as a public sphere have been hot discussion topics among scholars for many years. In addition, the role of social media and especially Facebook as a public sphere has been frequently studied and discussed by researchers. However, how contextual factors such as the economy or politics could influence this potential of social media has not received enough attention.

In addition, aside from the influence of macro factors, such as governments or organizations, on how people use Facebook, the individuals who use Facebook make the final decision about how to use Facebook. That means it is relevant to analyse the personal use of Facebook and why people choose the different possibilities that the Facebook platform offers to them. This study uses affordances as well as participatory culture theoretical approaches to understand how individuals use Facebook. Many scholars have applied this theoretical approach to analyse how users apply digital technology and social media (Treem & Leonardi, 2013; Bucher & Helmond, 2017). While the economic and political conditions influence user behaviour, they may in turn be affected by Facebook users' behaviour. Discourse analysis is used here to study the dynamism of the interplay between all of these factors.

The final step of this study is an attempt to connect the macro and micro levels of Facebook use in Iran and New Zealand and compare them. To do that, there is a need for a theoretical perspective that connects major structural conditions to the minor personal choices. Although various scholars in the social sciences have tried to connect these macro and micro factors

(Giddens, 1984; Hurrelmann, 1988; Archer, 2003; Bourdieu & Nice, 1977) Foucault's theoretical approach will be used here because the concept of resistance which Foucault presents could be helpful to analyse some applications of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand. In addition, Foucault's stress on the concept of power and knowledge and the dynamics of power-knowledge in a society makes this approach suitable for analysing various forms of power relations that influence the use of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand.

3.3 Theoretical Model

Each of the theoretical approaches mentioned above can help in the analysis of the influence of political and economic conditions on how people use Facebook in Iran and New Zealand. How these theoretical approaches could be connected together to explore the research problem is shown in Figure 11.

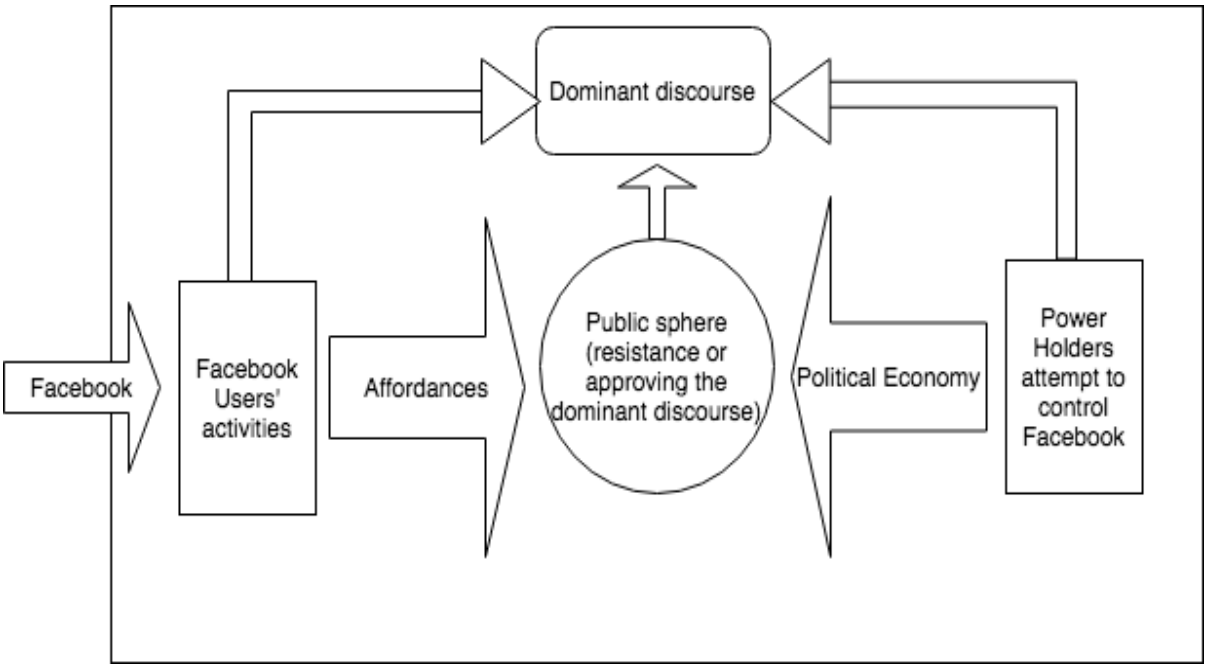


Figure 11: Theoretical framework of the study

The important components of the theoretical model are:

- A social media (in this study, Facebook) enters a new social context (in this study, Iran or New Zealand), with pre-existing political and economic conditions.

- Facebook users apply new Facebook affordances to participate in the public sphere to empower or criticise the current dominant discourse or introduce new discourses. This aspect will be studied through the theoretical approach of affordances.
- Macro-level social factors such as the government or big organizations that hold the power and are supported by, or support, the dominant discourse use different techniques to protect and promote the current dominant discourse and stop Facebook users from resisting the dominant discourse. This aspect will be studied through a political economy approach.
- There are two main ways users can affect social powers. First, users can participate in the public sphere and negotiate new values and norms, challenging the current discourse and promoting a counter discourse. This part will be studied using the public sphere theoretical approach. Secondly, users can directly take part in some actions, such as political movements or revolutions, that overthrow the social system and replace it with a new system, possibly with many dramatic changes to the current discourse.

Different theories, which have been used to form the theoretical framework of the study, will be discussed in the rest of this chapter.

3.4 Media Affordances

The term ‘affordances’ refers to how an environment offers different options to individuals. An affordances approach indicates that each technology has some potential capabilities that may be found, chosen and used by users. This approach highlights the importance of the users’ goals, environment, and contextual conditions on how they apply a technology (Rabinowitz et al., 2004). According to Katz (2011), affordances are the existing features of

an item that provide users with the opportunity to use these features in new ways. This interaction between the technology and its users defines the potential uses of an affordance. An affordances approach provides a strong framework for considering the interaction between technologies and users (Gaver, 1991). There is a permanent challenge between users' goals and the limitations of technology, as technology users limit their goals to what they imagine the capabilities of a technology to be (Leonardi, 2011).

How a technology's affordances are being used is influenced by differences at the individual level and also at a group level. As Baym (2010b) has argued, applying different affordances leads to different behaviours and accordingly creates different groups of users. When a technological platform is adopted by a group, it leads the group to a new form of collective behaviour. Therefore, when affordances of a technological device are discussed, the context of the technology that influences the exploration and application process of affordances has already been considered (Bloomfield et al., 2010). Although the physical appearance of technological devices may seem similar to users, according to the context in which they are applied they offer different functions, and users can manipulate the technology functions to define a new usage of the device (Leonardi, 2011). In this view, technologies, such as Facebook, are neither used in predetermined ways nor completely free to be used in optional ways (Hutchby, 2001).

The media affordances approach argues that a mediated communication experience is the result of the interaction between two communicators with respect to what a device has to offer to a user, and how the user applies the device (Sanders, 1999). Baym (2010a) argues that media technologies, similar to other forms of technology, could be used in different forms that she pinpoints as: already known, surprising, or disruptive. For example, people may use their

mobile phones for phone calls and conversations, which is a regular way of using a phone. In addition, media technologies might be used in a surprising way. For instance, the social network 'Orkut', which is American, was quickly appropriated and dominated by Brazilian and Indian users. Furthermore, media could be used in a disruptive way; for example, people may use media to form an intimate relationship without a real-world meeting (Baym, 2010b).

3.4.1 Social media and Facebook affordances

Many traits of social media such as anonymity, building a network of users, or different ways of achieving information, have been highlighted and studied by scholars as the main affordances of these media platforms (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013). By reviewing affordances of ICT, Conole and Dyke (2004) have identified access to information, speed of change in technology, the ability to experience new things, the ability to reach and engage with others, being able to comment on or criticise different topics, the non-linear structure of the Web, risk and uncertainty, the speed of information exchange, convergence and divergence, and surveillance, as significant mentioned affordances. In another study of social media affordances, Cabiddu et al. (2014) studied how tourism agencies use social media affordances, and argued that persistent engagement as a social media affordance presents the ability to stay in contact with their customers to tourism agencies. Also, Malsbender et al. (2014), argue that the six most important social media affordances for engagement with customers are: visibility of the content which is produced by users; accessibility of the produced content; ability to produce or edit the content by the producer or other users; formation of a social network; the possibility to react to other users, enabling the users of learning; and innovating by expressing the ideas. In another study of Islamic activist NGOs in Malaysia, Raja-Yusof et al. (2016) explored how these NGOs use social media affordances to achieve their goals. The researchers found the most important affordances used by these organizations were advertising, educating, collecting money, sharing information, and actions to resolve the

problems. These studies indicate that businesses and religious NGO organizations use very similar media affordances.

Because different affordances of a technology can become evident in different social conditions, Bloomfield et al. (2010) questioned what conditions and situations make an affordance appear. The highlighted role of economic and political conditions in the emergence of different Facebook affordances have been mentioned by them and some other scholars. For example, Pimmer and Tulenko (2016) have studied the affordances of the convergence of mobile-networked communication and social media for global health in low-income and middle-income countries. They argue that it is important to consider factors such as economic conditions, privacy and surveillance issues, the quality of laws and rules of communication, social equality of participants, and technical skills, as influential factors on developing the affordances or limitations of a technology in a society. Another widely used affordance of Facebook is its ability to access a wider audience and share thoughts or feelings with a larger community rather than only among friends (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010). Anonymity is another affordance of Facebook, which in many countries people have used to avoid being targeted by the government and other political forces. For instance, Tufekci and Wilson (2012) have underlined the anonymity affordance of Facebook and mentioned how Egyptians used the many-to-many affordances of Facebook as a non-political social media to overcome the risk of being targeted or marginalized by the dominant government in the Tahrir square revolution.

Although various forms of social media offer various affordances for communication, two–way, or many-to-many, communication is one of the most important affordances of social media (Crawford, 2009; Hawn, 2009). Idris and Wang (2009) suggest a classification of

Facebook affordances as pedagogical affordances, social affordances, and technological affordances. Pedagogical affordances include supporting innovative learning approaches, motivating students, presenting authentic materials, and enabling student reflections. Social affordances of Facebook are affordances such as promoting various interactions, supporting various communication formats, and enabling peer evaluation. An affordance of Facebook that has been mentioned frequently by scholars is the control over users' information that enables people to keep their privacy and manage their self–presentation on Facebook (Kuo et al., 2013). It is evident that there are some common affordances of Facebook which are frequently applied by users in different contexts. Anonymity and controlling personal information, access to a broad range of audiences, non-linear communication, and forming a social network, can be highlighted as the most frequently mentioned affordances of social media. However, how users apply different affordances is influenced by factors such as the economy, rules and laws, and users' skills and preferences.

3.5 Political Economy

The relationship between the economy and political powers has always been one of the concerns of social science scholars (Salamon & Siegfried, 1977; Stigler, 1971; Korten, 1998). This relationship usually is discussed under the topic of the political economy (Caporaso & Levine, 1992). Political economics has a long history and includes different approaches in both social science and economics (Wamsley & Zald, 1973). The history of the political economy shows that the concern about managing social resources by power holders started with Adam Smith and David Ricardo's concept of the 'Labour Theory of Value' (Dobb & Dobb, 1975), which argues that if the value of a product is created by workers, then workers deserve to receive that extra value because it is the outcome of their work (Vianello, 1990). However, the importance of labour as a value creator has more recently been replaced by an emphasis on the consumer, as neoclassical economists suggested

that value is created by consumers rather than labourers (Cova et al., 2011) . The domination of a neoclassical approach in economics has resulted in the critical theory approach to the relationship between the economy and political powers, as introduced by the neo-Marxist Frankfurt school (Geuss, 1981). These scholars pointed out the crucial role of the culture in shaping the structure and relations of power in a society. On the other hand, neo-Marxists were concerned with the role of the economy in the mass production of the culture (Baudrillard & Levin, 1981; Horkheimer, 1982; Bourdieu, 1975; Granovetter, 1985; Kellner, 1997) and the emergence of 'critical media studies' was the result of their pessimism about the relationship between culture and economy in the modern world (Kellner, 2002). Neo-Marxist scholars believed that capitalism is a system that makes marketable products from everything, including the workforce, raw materials, and even culture (Albornoz, 2015a).

Apart from the Frankfurt school, Harold Innis introduced the concept of 'Medium Theory' as an approach to political economy. Innis did not follow the Marxist tradition (Easterbrook and Watkins, 1984) and believed that changes in the distribution of politics and economic powers can result in changes in media technologies. Using the term 'monopoly of knowledge' he claimed that power holders not only control media administration but also control the currency of knowledge in the society (Carey, 1975). Innis, in addition, introduced the term 'information industries' to highlight the economic or industrialised aspect of producing cultural material (Babe, 2009).

The political economy approach has been subject to different trends, and its focal point has changed along with researchers' priorities. Mosco (2015) identifies five different trends in political economy research: globalisation of political economy research; a new turn in an

enduring emphasis on historical research; a shift to alternative standpoints, especially feminism and labour; the transition from an emphasis on old media to social media, and expansion in political activism.

3.5.1 Political Economy of Communication

Mosco (2014) argues that the political economy of communication, instead of being concerned with the formal aspects of media productions, is concerned with social forces which affect the production and distribution of media content. In general, the political economy of communication is about studying the relationship between media and power in a society. The central role of mass media and its influence on society attracted some other thinkers with different interests to neo-Marxists towards the political economy of media (Golding & Murdock, 1991; Wasko, 2012). With the 'culture industry' related to the mass production of cultural goods to harmonize people with the capitalist society, Adorno highlights the role of media in expanding the hegemony of capitalism and normalizing the political and economic power relations in the society (Wasko et al., 2011). Taking a political economy approach enables researchers to analyse and understand the influence of culture, power and other social factors on how people are affected by media technologies (Berry, 2015). Al-Enad (1990) argues that the media situation in a society is deeply influenced by the dominant contextual conditions in the society. For example, if a society is authoritarian, the dominant power makes all the decisions about the content and system of the media, and the media are regulated to protect the domination of the ruling power and to stop people using the media for criticizing the power relations. According to Djankov et al. (2003), in democratic societies media also play an important role in protecting the current power, however, in these societies media have a crucial role in shaping people's minds and the whole entity of the society; because of that, both the ruling class and even dominated groups attempt to control media to use it according to their wishes .

Various strategies that social powers choose to control the media in society, and how social powers use media to limit people's freedom and protect the current power relations, are the central questions in the political economy of communication (Herman & Chomsky, 2010; Prat & Strömberg, 2013).

3.5.1.1 The political economy of social media

The popularity of social media, and especially Facebook as the most popular social media platform, persuades some groups with higher social and political powers to control it (Shirky, 2011). In many studies on digital media, scholars have been optimistic about the emancipatory potential of the social media platforms (Trenz, 2009; Haddix & Sealey-Ruiz, 2012; Gurevitch et al., 2009), however, according to Hardy (2014), this optimistic vision of media technologies has ignored some potential problems such as inequality of access to digital media or attempts by dominant social powers to control the social media environment. He argues that digital technologies usually have been considered as being separate from their socio-political context and it is necessary for scholars to step outside the methodological boundaries and start analysing these technologies in a philosophical and historical context.

One of the most highlighted changes in the relationship between the producers and users of media content that appeared in the digital media era is what Toffler (1980) named as the emerging 'prosumer'. This term refers to the new combined form of media production and consumption in Facebook as well as other social media platforms, which used to be separate processes in the mass media. This affordance of the Internet enables people and groups to produce and share their own content, and to resist the dominant powers, however, it also creates an opportunity for capitalism to exploit Internet users as free digital labourers (Van Dijck, 2009). Although digital media have enabled users to produce and share their own media content, the role of governments as an influential factor on using the Internet in a

society has been highlighted. According to Winseck (2017) the role of the government in controlling the Internet environment remains crucial because the government is the Internet policymaker or infrastructure provider of the Internet in the country.

Some scholars argue, despite the differences between social media and mass media, capitalism maintains a similar approach to both. In addition, social media give new affordances to capitalism to expand its power to turn social media users to marketable goods and make a profit from them (Albornoz, 2015b). The political economy of social media is shaped by techniques of social control such as using copyright or forming a community of users to sell them as a commodity (Mansell, 2004). By applying these techniques, capitalism has turned the Internet into a more private space or even a 'monopolistic market', rather than a free public sphere that is accessible to all people (McChesney, 2013; Van Couvering, 2004).

In addition, nowadays, there are many new gatekeepers on the Internet to control the flow of information, which Mejias (2013) argues deforms the Internet from a potentially free public sphere to a totally controlled private space that does not allow any democratic action. McChesney (2013) argues that this transformation of the internet from a public sphere to a marketplace is inevitable when capitalism takes control of the Internet. For example, Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and owner of Facebook, said in 2010: '…When you give everyone a voice and give people power, the system usually ends up in a really good place, so what we view our role as is giving people that power.' (http://www.newsbusters.org/)

Facebook was initially framed as a tool that gives people power and voice, however, Facebook later assumed a capitalist nature and attempts to maximise its profits became more essential (Srnicek, 2017). Mosco (2017) argues that it is obvious that Facebook, and some

other giant internet companies such as Google or eBay, as capitalist corporations, are trying to monopolise the Internet and keep their control over it. For example, Facebook has bought some other smaller companies such as Instagram (http://edition.cnn.com), which could be a potential danger in terms of Facebook's domination of social media.

The speed of commercialization of online space in different societies, as well as the increase of advertising on online platforms, has resulted in emerging forms of 'targeted advertising' in which companies can choose and target their advertisement receiver specifically based on their desired characteristics (Norris, 2017). In some new online advertising activities, users' information is being misused and privacy is being harmed by companies (Albornoz, 2015b). An example of this misuse of personal data is the Cambridge Analytica scandal, which will be discussed in future chapters. The monopolization of the Internet by companies such as Facebook and Google gives them the power to pay less attention to users' concerns about protecting their private data (Jin & Feenberg, 2015). According to Hardy (2014) media companies apply different strategies such as data mining and using multi-platform advertising to control media markets. In addition, big companies have access to more capital to invest in online businesses at a lower price to beat their rivals, and they can effect internet regulations for their own benefit. For example, Mark Zuckerberg is frequently invited to formal national or international political events, such as the G8 summit, where he discusses world politics alongside the other world leaders, which shows the influence of these companies in global decision-making (McChesney, 2013) as well as the importance of social media in recent politics.

Although big online capitalist companies, as well as the political powers, attempt to control social media, there are forms of resistance such as open source software or new forms

of media productions which are notable (Mansell, 2004). Mosco (2015) has mentioned some of the difficulties in controlling new media, as well as the opportunities that it gives to the users to resist the controlling powers. The ability to produce their own content cheaply is a social media affordance that some suppressed groups can use to create and disseminate messages. The global nature of social media creates a more difficult situation for capitalism to gain total control over it. Furthermore, the marketable product of social media is information, and the ubiquity of social media makes it very hard for capitalism to manage and control the information market. Moreover, to produce information on social media, capitalism needs highly educated people, who usually are not easy subjects to control.

3.6 Public Sphere

It is a common idea among many political and social scholars that a democratic society needs a system that enables people to share their ideas and discuss their concerns (Gimmler, 2001; Bohman, 1997). Habermas has named this place the public sphere and describes it as:

> … a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which individuals assemble to form a public body. Then, they behave neither like a business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of constitutional order affairs subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy (Habermas, 2001, p.102).

Habermas states that some basic conditions are necessary for an ideal public sphere, including that access to the public sphere should be guaranteed for everybody, people should participate in the public sphere as individuals rather than group members, and the public sphere should be free from economic or state power (Goode, 2005). According to Ferree et al. (2002), an ideal

public sphere should have some features to empower and sustain a strong social democracy. In fact, the type of participants in the public sphere, the quality of their participation, and how people share their ideas in the public sphere are important factors. The order of talking and the quality of people's communication is another important condition that an ideal public sphere should meet. In practice, the concept of public sphere, introduced by Habermas, as a network of exchanging information and opinions that ultimately forms public opinions, occurred for a short time in the late eighteenth century in some European countries such as France and Germany (Habermas, 1991; Melton, 2001).

Castells (2008) argues that the political system of a society is defined by the way that the dominant government deals with peoples' concerns and with public opinion; that is, the nature of the interaction between people and the state through the public sphere, and how public opinions are formed in a society and become effective. Public sphere scholars have frequently acknowledged the important role of the public sphere as a democratic element between people and the state (Castells, 2008; Newman, 2005). In particular, the public sphere enables citizens to share and discuss new ideas in a rational and critical way to form new public ideas and transfer these new ideas to the decision makers, which is necessary for democracy (Ferree et al., 2002). Some scholars argue that since a public sphere involves interaction between the social members and the state, to discuss social concerns, it is always affected by the social contextual conditions such as politics and the economy (Newman, 2005; Calhoun, 1992).

The Habermasian concept of the public sphere has attracted the attention of many thinkers, who have then explored, criticised, and developed different approaches to the public sphere (Hauser, 1999; Fraser, 1990; Fraser, 2007; Villa, 1992). According to Wodak and Koller (2008), different approaches to the public sphere could be categorised into four groups,

comprising late modernists, postmodernists, feminists, and other theorists. Each of these approaches uses the strengths of the Habermasian definition of the public sphere while criticizing its problems (Wodak & Koller, 2008). Late-modern-school approach scholars, who focused on the dominant norms of a public sphere, criticise the Habermasian public sphere for relying only on white middle-class men's norms. These scholars argue that this limitation makes Habermas' idea of the public sphere too narrow to explain the dynamism of communication and decision-making in societies, while in many modern societies, social norms are not only the norms of the dominant group but also the norms of the other social groups. Nevertheless, the late-modern school accepts other conditions that Habermas has introduced for a public sphere (Koopmans & Erbe, 2004).

Another important criticism of the Habermasian public sphere, provided by post-modernist scholars, is that Habermas' definition of public sphere considers only one public sphere in a society, while multiple different public spheres might exist at the same time in a society. These scholars argue that a society may have many parallel public spheres originating from different discourses and people with different cultural attitudes. These parallel public spheres are where public opinions and alternative discourses form to change the dominant discourse (Villa, 1992). One of the most highlighted criticisms of the Habermasian public sphere is from the feminist point of view, introduced by Nancy Fraser. Fraser (1990) argued that Habermas' concept of the public sphere is an idealised form of the public sphere, which excludes women as well as other social groups from taking part in discussions. Fraser (1995) suggests that a postmodern definition of public sphere should eliminate all these inequalities, and include a discussion of topics which are considered private by the dominant patriarchal bourgeois ideology. She introduces another form of the public sphere, in the post-industrial era, which can form in response to the dominant discourse, proposing that multiple public spheres give a

voice to different suppressed social groups and interests. Two other important critiques on the Habermasian public sphere came from Jean-François Lyotard and Chantal Mouffe. According to Papacharissi (2009), Lyotard believes that Habermas has overstressed the role of rational communication in the public sphere, and that democracy is usually the outcome of chaos rather than a rational critical discussion among alternative discourses. Another alternative form of the public sphere, introduced by Mouffe (2000), is 'agnostic pluralism', which suggests that in modern or postmodern democracies an appropriate plurality is impossible. Mouffe (2000) argues that agonistic pluralism is about a 'vibrant clash of democratic political positions,' which is more sympathetic to the multiplicity of ideas and opinions than the deliberative model of democracy. She remarks on the antagonistic nature of online political arguments that occur in activities such as writing blogs, posting videos on YouTube, or other types of online arguments.

In summary, the main critiques of the Habermasian approach to the public sphere indicate that dominant norms of the public sphere should not be only the norms of the dominant group in the society, but an ideal public sphere should cover all social groups and their different concerns and not exclude some marginal groups and their important topics from the discussions. Also, communication in a public sphere is not necessarily rational and critical, but sometimes can be antagonistic. Following the critiques of the essential elements of a public sphere, this thesis takes the position that a public sphere needs to be accessible for everybody and all social groups, it should be free from dominant powers, people should be able to express their ideas as individuals, and people should communicate and exchange their ideas even if the communication is not rational and critical.

Apart from the qualities of the public sphere, which has been the focus point of many public sphere schools and scholars, Castells (2008) highlights the importance of the quantity, as well as the quality, of the communication. He argues that the public sphere is not only about communication among public members, but also is a source of ideas augmenting social debates, which has a positive influence on making social decisions. The public sphere is not only a social space or medium used for public communication, but also a cultural/informational pool of opinions that enriches public discussions, promotes public debates, and finally affects decision-making by the state.

Thus, a public sphere has both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The quantitative aspect is related to the amount of the communications that take place in the public sphere, which shows how many citizens engage in discussions to form a pool of new ideas and opinions. The qualitative aspect refers to what Habermas and other public sphere scholars have suggested as being the availability of the public sphere to all public members, being free from power, and also concerning how people participate in the public sphere and communicate their ideas. The below demonstrates both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of a public sphere.

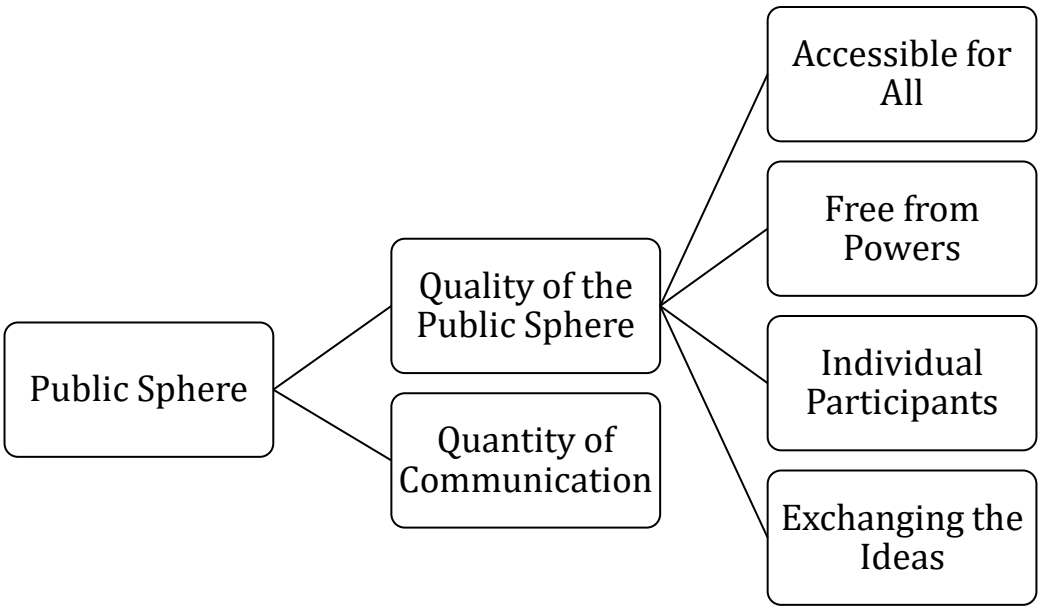


Figure 12: The requirements of an online public sphere

As shown in Figure 12, Facebook or any other platform should meet some requirements to be considered as a public sphere. It should be accessible to all. Habermas (1991) argues that being accessible to all social members is an important characteristic of any public entity, therefore a public sphere is supposed to be open to all citizens to participate in sharing and discussing new ideas and public issues (52). Some other scholars, such as Nancy Fraser, have stressed inclusiveness as an important prerequisite of the public sphere (Fraser, 1990). Thus, a crucial element of a public sphere is to be available to all the social members to engage in public discussions and share ideas publicly (Curran, 1991; Friedland et al., 2006). Moreover, some scholars believe that availability to the public is not only an important condition but also the basic construct of the public sphere (Verstraeten, 1996; Wright, 2010). Habermas agrees that a public sphere requires a specific medium to transfer people's message to others, hence, mass media (e.g., radio and television) may have been ideal public spheres during the past decades (Habermas, 2001).

It should be free from imposing different forms of power: In addition to being accessible for everybody, Habermas (2001) argues that a public sphere should be independent of various forms of power, such as political and economic, and be free from governmental control and censorship. Habermas and some other scholars have pointed out that the privatization of the public sphere endangers the quality of it (Fuchs, 2014). Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples argue that corporations form the dominant political, social, cultural, and economic powers in the 21st century, and accordingly control the public sphere (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002). However, the post-modern school of public sphere theory argues that there are different parallel public spheres which are dominated by different dominant power discourses, enabling all social groups to have a voice and share their ideas and opinions.

Habermas has suggested that people should participate in a public sphere as private individuals rather than in their organizational role or any other form of social position (Habermas, 2001). Private individuals use only the power of reasoning and logic to present another side of the discussion and achieve agreement (Lunt & Stenner, 2005). Some scholars argue that after the electronic revolution the era of a face-to-face public sphere has vanished, therefore, democracies should look for the public sphere through electronic communication (Poster, 1997; Downey & Fenton, 2003). Poster (1997) believes that the new forms of public relations suffer from the lack of interactive behaviour, which used to be a central feature of political democracy.

Exchanging ideas: Although exchanging ideas and opinions about different topics is the main purpose of the public sphere, the quality of the process of exchanging, discussing, and criticizing ideas, has been mentioned by several scholars (Çela, 2015; Boeder, 2005; Holub, 2013). While Habermas mentioned that a rational critical debate about the discussion topic is a necessary condition for exchanging the ideas in a public sphere (Calhoun, 1992), some other thinkers such as Fraser do not agree with him (Fraser, 1990). With respect to how citizens participate in a discussion and exchange their ideas, many scholars agree that citizens should exchange their ideas in a public sphere to empower the democracy, rationally or antagonistically (Dahlberg, 2005).

3.6.1 The Internet as a new public sphere

The social and political effects of the Internet have been popular research topics since the mid-1990s (Etzioni, 2000; Jones, 1995; Robins, 1995). The Internet's affordances and its capabilities looked promising to many scholars who believed that the Internet could be a satisfactory public sphere (Crossley & Roberts, 2004; Papacharissi, 2002; Dahlberg, 2001).

For example, Papacharissi (2009) argues that some features of the Internet, such as being independent of the dominant power or free from geographical boundaries, make the Internet a good example of a public sphere. Matthew D. Barton considers the Internet as an outstanding innovation in communication history that is maybe even more important than many other significant media outlets such as radio and television. He argues that the Internet enables users to produce and share their own content, and this is the most important distinction between the Internet and mass media (Barton, 2005). Bar-Tura (2016) argues that societies are currently experiencing the development of a new public sphere in the form of digital media, enabling people to discuss and share data or even some new forms of political participation. Although the political economy of communication, which is presented in the previous section, is concerned about how political and economic power control media, some characteristics of social media make it more promising to enable social members to participate in a free public sphere. Hanrath and Leggewie (2013) argue that digital media users can ignore established media rules and agendas and share their desired content without being concerned about gatekeepers. By sharing their opinions, users can participate in forming a national public sphere. Şen and Bölümü-Elazığ (2012) argue that unlike mass media that mainly provide a one-directional communication, the Internet affords a mutual communication. In addition, the Internet provides an opportunity for minorities to challenge the dominant powers, norms, and behaviours by creating different online forums and discussing their own concerns. Furthermore, online groups make connections between members inside a group to share news, as well as connections to the members of the other social groups (Ayyad, 2009). According to Castells (2007), using the Internet's facilities such as SMS, blogs, Podcasts, and Wikis gives users the ability to build their communication networks and use P2P (peer-to-peer) technology to change the format and content of media. Some scholars argue that using the Internet is affordable and it provides immediate access to shared messages all over the world. Some of

the facilities that the Internet presents to the users, such as live video sharing, used to be available only to political leaders or entertainment companies, who were able to use these facilities on special occasions such as big public events (Bar-Tura, 2016).

On the other hand, some scholars have not been very optimistic about the capacity of the Internet to act as a favourable public sphere (Dean, 2003; Meinrath et al., 2011). Commercialization is an important factor that threatens the Internet's potential capability to play the role of a public sphere, as is argued by many scholars (Papacharissi, 2009; Poor, 2005; Dahlberg, 2001). Habermas argues that the commercialization of mass media has changed the direction of mass media to prioritise the capitalist economy; hence, mass media and commercial desires have dominated the public sphere and eliminated the negotiated democratic public discourse. This is what Habermas considers to be 're-feudalization of the public sphere' (Warner, 2013). Habermas preferred to consider the Internet as a public space, which can, but not necessarily will, develop into a public sphere (Papacharissi, 2009).

In accordance with Habermas some scholars argue that the Internet is a product of capitalism and, for the Internet managers, making a profit from the Internet is more important than citizens' rights (McChesney, 2013). In addition to commercialization, several other factors have been described as preventing the Internet from being a public sphere. Some scholars believe that an online conversation should be mutual, about a common interest, and be rational, to be considered democratic. This type of communication connects social members; however, some studies show that online communication sometimes has the risk of producing cultural separation rather than connecting people and different cultures. Thus, according to some studies, access to information, reciprocity of communication, and commercialization are three main barriers that limit the Internet from

acting as a public sphere (Papacharissi, 2009). In addition, although anonymity and a highlighted affordance, which the Internet provides for users, encourage online political discussions (Oates et al., 2006; Bimber, 1998; Dahlgren, 2005), political communication can also be controlled and guided by a few people rather than all the group members (Papacharissi, 2009).

3.6.2 Does Facebook meet the requirements of a public sphere?

Facebook, as one of the most effective social media platforms, has attracted many scholars to research its emancipatory function and its ability to behave as a potential public sphere (Valtysson, 2012; Castells, 2008). Some scholars have claimed that Facebook fulfils the requirements for a real public sphere because it is a very effective combination of positive aspects of previous forms of public sphere such as newspapers or town halls. These scholars argue that Facebook is able to connect members of real social groups in an effective way and helps to overcome geographical barriers. In addition, while politicians can use Facebook to reach people, they are not able to enforce their ideas on people (Westling, 2007; Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014; Klein, 1999). According to Skogerbø and Krumsvik (2015), Facebook is a place to present and discuss new ideas and form new political agendas. Facebook creates the opportunity for marginalized groups to access the public and send their message to other groups (Marichal, 2012). For example, in the 'Arab Spring' Facebook played a crucial role in providing an active public sphere in the Arab world to allow people from different races, genders, social positions, or religions to discuss important topics (Benmamoun et al., 2012). Facebook increases users' political information and their willingness to take political action (Sørensen, 2016). However, factors such as the socio-political system, values and beliefs, and context, influence the strategies that users choose for using online social networking websites (Waters & Lo, 2012). According to Camaj and Santana (2015), the

design or structure of a technology plays an important role in forming the quality of online discussions. For instance, in Egypt, while the government had monopolised the mass media and used it to manipulate citizens' minds, Facebook played the role of an alternative media (Salvatore, 2013). Valtysson (2012) has considered Facebook as a public sphere and examined the communication structure on Facebook, the ownership of what users upload, and how Facebook users imagine this structure. Using the Habermasian definition of a public sphere he found that Facebook users believe that Facebook could be used as a public sphere which users can form according to their desire. However, the process of what Habermas calls the 'feudalization of the public sphere' was still identifiable.

Public activities are based on people's interests and lifestyles, and people with different backgrounds have a chance to come together and form a new public opinion. Usually, the young generation is involved in this type of activity (Johannessen et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2015). However, Lee et al. (2015) argue that social media affords the opportunity of shaping a structured network of individuals and developing collective actions from isolated pieces. Bennett (2012) defines these online political movements as 'do it yourself' movements, because these movements usually do not have a leader or even a common ideology. Although many scholars have endorsed the positive effect of social media in political engagements, some scholars criticise social media and the way it offers users a less dangerous form of political behaviour, such as joining online groups on Facebook, as 'slacktivism' (Shirky, 2011, p.38). According to Lane and Dal Cin (2018) slacktivism is a type of online activity which has minimal consequences for the actor. This type of activity ultimately reduces the actors' effective offline participations (2018).

Some scholars have mentioned the importance of the 'visibility' of messages and ideas on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, as potential public spheres (Koopmans, 2004; Meyer & Moors, 2005; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Dahlberg (2018) suggests that the visual nature of most shared materials on social media, makes the question of visibility more important. Although many scholars assume the Internet gives equal opportunities to people to present their ideas, some studies have shown that social networking websites do not provide equal opportunities to all users, and consequently they cannot behave like a proper public sphere. For example, Batorski and Grzywińska (2018) studied three dimensions of a public sphere on Facebook, in terms of its structural, representational and interactional aspects. The study showed that most Polish Facebook users do not take part in political debates on Facebook, which relates to the structural side of the public sphere. The representational side of the public sphere on Facebook refers to the visibility of different new ideas on Facebook, and the study indicated that Facebook does not offer any special facilities for ideas that are less visible off the Internet. Furthermore, usually Facebook groups are not spaces where different ideas mix and interact with each other but are generally homogeneous and do not represent different ideas. This refers to the interactional dimension of Facebook. In another study, Faris et al. (2016) studied the form and structure of the networked public sphere in Egypt, Tunisia, and Bahrain. They applied a social network mapping technique on blogs and Twitter. They explored religious, social, cultural, and political expressions on these media platforms, and the results showed that the online public sphere in these countries is more divided and antagonistic and less inclusive, however, social media still has space for voices that are not tolerated in traditional media. To analyse the social influence of online social networks in Iran, Khaniki Hadi (2017) applied a Habermasian public sphere framework and investigated eight Iranian Facebook sites that were active about social issues. The research revealed that being active on Facebook can have a positive influence on informing the users about social

issues, however, some factors such as inequality, frequently changing discussion topics, and the value placed on visibility rather than having a good idea, limit Facebook from being a satisfactory public sphere.

Contextual conditions and culture are important factors that can also affect the quality of communication in a public sphere. Some researchers argue that it is impossible to separate a networked public sphere and the structure of communication in the networked public sphere from a relationship with the structure of the power and the dominant discourse (Friedland et al., 2006). Bolsover studied online political communication in China to explore how western definitions of the public sphere can explain Chinese online political communication. He argues that many researchers have applied western concepts such as the public sphere to Chinese online political communication without considering the contextual differences between China and western countries. He compared the comments on news items on Chinese social media to western social media. The results showed that Chinese social media users are less interested in talking together or trying to understand other people's opinions. He suggests that scholars should introduce more appropriate theoretical approaches for each context (Bolsover, 2017).

Another important aspect of Facebook that affects the visibility of different messages and ideas is related to Facebook algorithms (Bucher, 2012; Min, 2019; Bucher, 2018). According to Kite (2016) the Facebook algorithm is a system or process that decides about the visibility of posted Facebook materials on Facebook users' Newsfeeds. Therefore, Facebook is able to give more attention to some posts or diminish the attention to other posts.

To summarise, many scholars insist on Facebook's potential as a new form of the public sphere for sharing and discussing new ideas. However, factors such as inequality of knowledge, visibility of ideas, appropriateness of the western definition of the public sphere, and the similarity of the group members' approach to issues, are identified as barriers to social media being an appropriate public sphere.

3.7 The Discourse of Power, Facebook, and Resistance

3.7.1 Discourse, power, knowledge

While a political economy approach helps to explore power relations in the production and use of media content, applying a discourse analysis is used to understand how these power relationships are established through a historical process, as the result of socio-historical conditions. Political economy is mainly concerned with how political values are produced, distributed and used in a society, while critical discourse analysis researchers attempt to understand the process by which this agenda is legitimised and becomes a normal part of the social members' daily lives.

Foucault defines discourse as a 'regime of truth' which enables social members to classify, interpret, understand, or judge a statement and expressions around them as true or false (Mills, 2004). In fact, discourse enables people to make sense of and judge the world around them. Foucault argues that things around us do not have any meaning by themselves, and so to understand the meaning of objects it is necessary to understand the discourse that creates those objects (Foucault, 1997). Discourse is a pattern of interpretation and understanding that exists in institutions and the culture of a society (Lemke, 2005). Foucault (1972) argues that discourse does not name or classify things but constructs them. Discourse enables social members to behave in a certain way or limit their behaviour (Mills, 2004). Foucault has

frequently pointed out the importance of structures in legitimizing certain forms of behaviour. For instance, in his analysis of prisons, Foucault looks at the structure and spatial features of a prison that make prisoners feel they are under permanent scrutiny and so behave in particular ways that the prison managers desire. In addition, Foucault believes the different organizations in a society, such as formal educational systems or legal forces or even libraries, support and promote the current dominant discourse. Therefore, any discourse analysis should pay attention to existing structures and rules as well as the statements made (Mills, 2004).

In Foucault's perspective, discourse and power are not owned by only one group of people or the government but are distributed in the society, in social members' relationships and everyday social practices. Power relationships in a society are usually the outcome of a long social and historical process, which could be understood through applying a critical discourse analysis. The relationship between discourse and power is not linear, as though discourse simply produces power. Discourse is a tool for power as well as the result of power; discourse promotes power; however, it undermines the power by offering its sensitive points to counter-discourses (Holliday, 2010). Foucault does not deny the importance of the government and state in society; however, power relations are not limited to the relationship between people and the state. In fact, Foucault sees power as a circulating and negotiable process that moves among discourses, which create power or are encouraged by power (Springer, 2012). Regardless of different types and categorizations of knowledge (Antal, 2000; De Jong & Ferguson-Hessler, 1996), any type of knowledge on Facebook must be communicated, as in video, audio, picture, text, or a combination of these formats (Chun et al., 2010), which are mainly created by Facebook users (Noyes, 2015).

Similar to knowledge, there are many different categorizations of power, such as the five types of power – reward power, coercive power, referent power, legitimate power, and expert power – as introduced by French et al. (1959). These can be described as follows:

- Reward power originates from the ability to give something valuable to others in exchange for their favourable behaviour.
- Coercive power comes from the ability to punish others because of disobedience.
- Referent power originates from people's or organizations' attractiveness and how their behaviour is followed by others.
- Legitimate power usually originates from the law, disciplines, and formal positions that people or organizations own.
- Expert power comes from the high level of skills and information that some people or organizations own (French et al., 1959).

These different forms of power could be identified in the process of using Facebook and be analysed as elements of power relations in using Facebook.

Fairclough (2013) identifies three different forms of discourse analysis: textual analysis, analysis of discourse practices, and analysis of social practices. Social practices are related to institutional and socio-cultural conditions, and the main question is whether a text supports the hegemony of the dominant discourse, which creates certain socio-cultural conditions. This study applies a discourse analysis of social practices based on Foucault's understanding of the relationship between knowledge and power.

The relationship between knowledge and power in Foucault's definition of discourse is crucial. Discourse, in Foucault's words, is an intertwined network of power and knowledge

and, in fact, while each statement that is being assumed as true, it imposes a specific form of power (Foucault, 1997). He says:

> We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault, 1977, P. 27).

Foucault argues that there are different struggling discourses in a society that are competing for domination and power. These discourses do not exist in a vacuum but in the society and all social behaviours.

3.7.2 Social media, Facebook and discourse

Foucault argues that discourse controls and guides people while technologies play an important role in shaping the structure of power in the society (Davis, 2007).

Fisher (2010) argues that Foucault's approach is productive for considering the power relations in digital relationships because the discourse of technology is influenced by social structure and how reality is structured in society, rather than being a very direct reflection of the reality (Fisher, 2010). According to Stanfill (2014), both users and social context play crucial roles in the final shape of social media in a society. He argues that in each society, when people apply a technology there is a dominant discourse that shapes how people make sense of that technology. Stanfill (2014) argues the interface is another discursive factor that influences how people use social media. Similar to other structures or institutional factors such as the government, a Web interface allows and encourages a specific set of actions and ideologies. He argues that the discourse of interface relates to the capabilities that a

technology offers to users, and discourse analysis of the interface is helpful for studying the affordances of an interface and understanding what type of actions have been made easy or difficult by an interface. In general, the roles of the interface, users, and structural forces such as the government and the governing system have been highlighted as the main dimensions of the discourse of social media and Facebook.

Herring (2013) believes that in analysing Web 2.0, it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of the new context and audiences. Social media expands the usual interactions among people; however, the norms of communication in everyday life become adjusted to the online context. Thus, considering the use of a social media as a discursive action, means it is necessary to analyse the situation, the institutional frame of the action, and the socio-cultural aspects of that usage, for a discourse analysis of that use (West & Trester, 2013).

Castells (2009) has emphasised the relationship between media technology and power structure. Castells argues that usually power has two main tools of enforcement. One is direct force, with possible punishments for people who act against the will of the power, leading people to behave in a certain way, which is legitimised by a discourse. The other necessitates establishing a set of meanings and values. Media have a crucial role to spread and normalise value systems, ideologies, and alternative forms of knowledge. Power holders attempt to control media to distribute messages that promote their desired knowledge and values as well as preventing criticism of the dominant discourse or promotion of alternative discourses (Van Dijk, 2011).

Considering the use of social media as a discursive action affirms the central importance of socio-cultural contextual, structural, and institutional contexts of action in analysing how

people use social media platforms. According to Carvalho (2008), Wodak and Meyer (2001, p. 66) also argue that there is a mutual relationship between specific discursive practices on the one hand, and the situation, institutional frame and social structures on the other hand. Therefore, three elements have been identified as important elements in shaping the discourse of social media and Facebook. A discourse analysis of Facebook should consider these three points:

- The social media interface, which offers some actions to the users.
- The context or social structure.
- Users of social media as people who can accept the dominant discourse and its value system or resist against that.

These elements of social media are in a mutual relationship as in the diagram below:

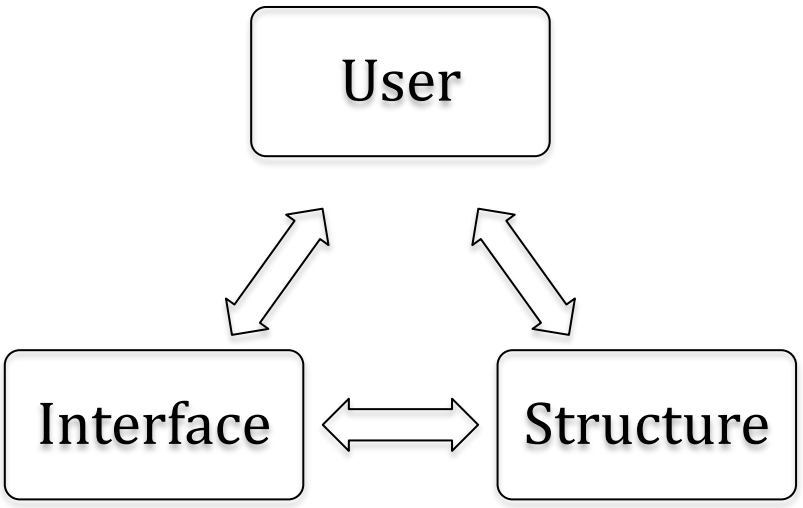


Figure 13: The elements of the process of using Facebook in a country

3.7.3 Discourse, resistance, and counter-discourse

Discourse legitimises the dominant power relations; however, Castells argues that there is not an infinite amount of power or powerlessness. There is a permanent probability of resistance from the subjects of power, while there is always a degree of conformity too. If resistance becomes bigger than the compliance then the power relations in a society change, and the process of domination and resistance starts again immediately (Foucault, 1982). In addition, Foucault argues that instead of attempting to understand the relationship between current discourse and facts, the duty of scholars is to reveal how social conditions are connected to the dominant discourse. While a dominant discourse enacts and legitimises a certain type of behaviour, social members establish the dominant discourse by their actions (Fisher, 2010). According to Foucault (1982), it is possible that people criticise and challenge the dominant discourse and power relations. Social orders, domination of discourses, and the identity of social objects are not permanent but temporary results of the struggle among different discourses (Meriläinen et al., 2004). Resistance exists wherever power exists and there is a permanent co-existence between these two, such that power is understandable in the light of resistance. Resistance against a dominant discourse usually appears as a new knowledge and regime of truth, which is the base of a new counter-discourse. Hence, in every study of discourse or power, in addition to the standardised or 'ideal' forms of actions, which are supported by the dominant discourse, the alternative forms of things promoted by counter-discourses should be considered as well (Meriläinen et al., 2004). This premise of the relationship between power and resistance makes it clear that people or organizations that hold the power in a society usually are aware of counter-discourses, resistance, and negotiations of power, and they attempt to control these struggles and legitimise the dominant power for as long as possible (Mills, 2004).

3.8 Combining the approaches of Habermas and Foucault

The theoretical framework of this thesis uses two points of view that may seem contradictory. These are a Habermasian definition of public sphere as well as Michel Foucault's notion of struggle and resistance in a society. Apparent contradictions between these positions arise from the difference between Habermas' understanding and definition of a public sphere and its relationship with a democracy, and Foucault's understanding of this relationship. Comparing the opinions of Habermas and Foucault about democracy can help to make these differences clearer.

According to Martin (2013), Habermas could be considered a theorist of agreement. He believes that democracy is the result of co-operation among social members in a public sphere and their attempts to reach an agreement. However, post-modern thinkers, such as Foucault, see democracy as the result of existing disagreements and struggles in society (2013). Habermas believes in legitimacy and legal process as the basis of democracies. He believes there are some universal and necessary foundations for communication that lead an instance of communication to an agreement. In the theory of Rational Communication Habermas attempts to present the communicative necessities for a rational discussion among citizens and different social groups to reach an agreement. Habermas emphasizes the crucial role of rational communicative actions, however, when it comes to the question of how to achieve this ideal communication, he does not present a clear answer (Flyvbjerg, 1988). While Habermas defends the importance of communicative action, Foucault accuses Habermas of being an idealist. Foucault argues that the idea of rational communicative action is utopian, and in reality never exists (Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1988).

Postmodern thinkers believe that it is impossible to ignore power in social interactions and that communication is always influenced by power (Taylor, 2005). Foucault argues that we

should not consider all groups as the same or similar; different groups have formed through a social and historical process and this shapes people's perspectives and interests. Since Foucault considers power as ever-present, freedom, in his theory, does not mean the absence of power. Foucault argues that we cannot imagine a social interaction free from power relations. Unlike Habermas, who wishes for a communication free from power relations, Foucault emphasises resistance against and struggle over power. Postmodern scholars see democracy as a result of these struggles in society, rather than the agreement that Habermas advocates. Rustow (1999) for example, argues that democracy is not the outcome of people or the government's desire and agreement over disputed issues. Instead, Rustow considers democracy as a 'ceasefire' among competing groups that realize it is impossible to have absolute power and domination. From this point of view, democracy is more a result of struggles in a society rather than a logical communication and agreement (1999).

Although the disagreement between Habermas and Foucault about the public sphere seems unresolvable, Flyvbjerg (1988) argues that in a real situation a combination of both ideas is possible. Flyvbjerg suggests that a researcher should test the rational communicative qualities that Habermas suggests in a public sphere to decide whether the reality is closer to Habermas' or Foucault's theory. Flyvbjerg suggests that: 'The researcher must ask how communication takes place, and how politics and democracy operate' and whether an actual existing public sphere in a society is more similar to what Habermas' public sphere theory suggests, or what Foucault expects, or a combination of both (Flyvbjerg, 1988: P216).

This study uses the theories of Habermas and Foucault in a manner similar to Flyvbjerg's suggestion. It approaches the online public sphere on Facebook in Iran and New Zealand by testing Habermas's definition of rational communication to explore to what extent the chosen

online communication follows the rationality that Habermas wishes for, or whether it follows the pattern of struggles and resistance that Foucault insists on.

4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology of the research and the process of designing the study to explore the research topic. Research is a systematic set of actions that a researcher takes to answer questions about a new topic or develop the existing human knowledge (Jones & Gratton, 2004; Mack et al., 2005; Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). The goal of the study and the research question inform the best research approach at different stages, such as sampling, data collection, and analysis techniques (Yin, 2013; O'leary, 2004; Mitchell & Jolley, 2012).

There are two main broad approaches to different research topics as well as social media. Researchers who use positivist research methods consider social phenomena as objects, which are separated from social actors and should be studied similar to physical objects (Myers, 1997; Fischer, 1998; Sarantakos, 2012). These scholars usually use quantitative methods, which are concerned with statistics and numbers more than the meaning of phenomena for social actors (Keat, 1979). The research methods employed by this group of researchers are similar to scientific methodologies, as they search for the general laws of a social phenomenon (Marvasti, 2003). In studying social media, quantitative analysis of big data is one of the research methods which recently has attracted many positivist scholars and organizations.

In comparison, interpretive researchers argue that people construct social phenomena and meanings during their interactions (Neuman, 2013). Fuchs (2017) argues that quantitative research methods ignore the connection between the statistics and numbers of social media users to their emotions, philosophy, experiences, and interpretations. These researchers

suggest that people's minds create social phenomena, and these phenomena are deeply affected by the context. Therefore, a social phenomenon can have different meanings and interpretations according to the culture and setting (Firestone, 1987). These scholars usually apply research methods, such as in-depth interviews, to focus on people's minds and feelings. Qualitative research is designed to answer questions about how, when, where and in what context a phenomenon emerges and becomes meaningful for social actors (Berg, 2001). According to Wimmer and Dominick (2013), qualitative research looks at certain behaviours in their context and considers the context in understanding the meaning of the behaviours. Qualitative researchers apply techniques such as ethnography, studying documents, textual analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, and many other techniques to collect data (Berg, 2004).

The main question of this study is**:** How do political and economic conditions influence how tertiary students use Facebook in Iran and New Zealand? In the process of designing the research, it is important to consider several points:

- The main purpose of the study is to investigate *how* the tertiary students use Facebook rather than measuring the quantity of this usage.
- The focus of this research is on *how* political and economic conditions influence how the tertiary students use Facebook.
- In addition, this study is an attempt to compare the influence of contextual factors, such as politics and the economy in Iran and New Zealand, and to explain these influences and differences in a qualitative way. A qualitative research design is appropriate to answer the question about *how* context can influence a social phenomenon.

4.2 Choosing a qualitative approach: a comparative case study

The ultimate goal of this study is to compare the influence of political and economic conditions on how tertiary students in Iran and New Zealand use Facebook. Creswell (2007) outlines five possible qualitative approaches to studying a social phenomenon: a phenomenological study, case study, narrative approach, ethnographic approach, and grounded theory approach. Although this study could use each of these approaches, the most appropriate research approach to achieve this goal is a qualitative case study. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a case study is a powerful tool that enables the researcher to examine complicated cases in their context. The reasons behind choosing a comparative case study methodology is, as Goodrick (2014) has mentioned, the appropriateness of the case study for studying the influence of context on different phenomena; or according to Hansen and Machin (2013), that case studies allow the researcher to investigate the actions in complicated situations. In addition, this study attempts to connect the macro-level variables such as politics and the economy to micro levels – tertiary students who use Facebook – and a case study is an effective method of connecting macro and micro levels of a phenomenon (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017).

Kaarbo and Beasley (1999) have mentioned different types of case study. The first type is using cases for description. In this type of case study, the researcher is more interested in describing the cases than in establishing any theoretical framework or hypothesis. The second type of case study is called a configurative case study. To do this, the researchers usually make a theoretical foundation as a guide for studying and comparing the cases. In the third form of case study the researcher studies cases to develop a theory or to establish hypotheses. In the other forms of case study, the researcher tests or refines specific theories. In this study the second form of case study has been used. This means the cases – Iran and New Zealand – have been explored and compared through the theoretical framework.

4.3 Research Design

The research question is about the influence of economic and political conditions on how tertiary students use Facebook. Therefore, the research design needed to address the structural differences and similarities between political and economic conditions in Iran and New Zealand, as well as how the tertiary students in these countries use Facebook. It asks how the interaction between the political and economic conditions in the countries, on the one hand, and the users' actions on Facebook, on the other hand, shapes the whole process of using Facebook in these countries. Each one of these steps requires a particular research technique for sampling, collecting data, and analysis. Then the study attempts to connect the macro-level factors of politics and economic conditions to the micro-level factors, being the Facebook users. Based on this assumption, the research design for this study has three phases, which are described in the following points:

4.3.1 Investigating the political economy of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand

The focus of this part of the study is on exploring the influence of big economic and political actors in both Iran and New Zealand in shaping the use of Facebook in these countries. The research analysed a sample of the most popular Facebook pages in Iran and New Zealand. The Facebook pages that attract many Facebook users in each country can be important indications of how Facebook is used on a large scale. In addition, these popular pages reveal the users who belong to the biggest group of the Facebook audience and have the most influential voices in Facebook in each country. This step of the study also analysed the effect of policies and laws or economic conditions on the use of Facebook.

4.3.2 Analysing how tertiary students use Facebook in Iran and New Zealand

How tertiary students in Iran and New Zealand use Facebook is considered in two aspects: first, how tertiary students in Iran and New Zealand choose different affordances of Facebook, and, secondly, how they think the political and economic conditions in their country can

influence these choices. The next part of the study concentrates on the users' activities and interactions on Facebook. It was important to see how regular Facebook users in Iran and New Zealand communicate on Facebook. This part of the study used the public sphere theoretical approach to analyse the quality of users' communications on Facebook.

4.3.3 Investigating the interaction between political and economic factors with students' use of Facebook, and how this interaction informs the process of using Facebook among Iranian and New Zealand students

This section of the study attempts to explore the interaction between the macro factors of economic and political conditions and the micro factors such as Facebook users, who in this study are tertiary students, in Iran and New Zealand, through a Foucauldian discourse analysis. To do that, the relationship between power and knowledge, as the basis of the Foucauldian definition of discourse, was explored through the interactions between the Facebook company, governments, corporations or organizations, and individual users. Facebook, similar to other media platforms, has been considered a battlefield of alternative discourses. This chapter also investigated the dynamics of domination and resistance in Facebook through the interaction between these four elements.

4.4 Collecting Data

For each phase of the study, different techniques of data collection were applied. These were: observation, content analysis, interview, survey, and document review.

Observation: This method was used to see how Iranians and New Zealanders use Facebook's public pages. The result of the observation is presented in Chapters 5,6,7 as examples of users' behaviour on Facebook pages. In addition, the observation, as well as the literature review, informed the questions of the interview and questionnaire.

Document review: This study used document reviewing in two different ways. First, by reviewing the online activities of Facebook users in order to analyse the quantity and quality of online communication on Facebook. Secondly, documents were reviewed to collect data about the political and economic situation in Iran and New Zealand, as well as Facebook company documents.

Interview: A number of New Zealand students and Iranian students were interviewed to collect data about tertiary students' opinions on different aspects of using Facebook, and how politics and the economy can influence their use of Facebook.

Questionnaire: Students in Iran and New Zealand were surveyed to collect more data about how tertiary students in Iran and New Zealand use Facebook and how the political and economic situation in these countries can influence the use of Facebook. In New Zealand, this took the form of an online questionnaire, but in Iran the online questionnaire was not accessible to the potential respondents, so some students filled in a printed questionnaire.

4.5 The Sampling Process

4.5.1 Choosing countries (cases)

To choose appropriate countries for the comparison, a purposeful sampling strategy was used. There were some requirements that the chosen countries had to meet to be suitable for this comparison. First, Facebook should be accessible and commonly used in these countries. For example, the study could not focus on North Korea or China because using Facebook is banned in these countries and people do not use it pervasively. In addition, the study required countries with significant differences in their contextual conditions. For example, comparisons between Iran and Turkey or Iran and Iraq, which have many similarities and few salient

differences, would not be productive because analysing these countries would not show the influence of different contextual conditions clearly. Furthermore, because this is a qualitative study and understanding Facebook users' feelings and behaviours plays a crucial role in the study, it is necessary that these activities be understandable to the researcher, in terms of both languages and cultures. Another important factor was the availability of the countries. As the researcher is an Iranian who resides in New Zealand, this makes these countries the most suitable cases to compare in this study.

4.5.2 Observation,

The process of the observation started by choosing the 50 most popular Facebook pages in Iran and New Zealand. Comparing the most popular Facebook pages in Iran and New Zealand identifies basic differences or similarities in Facebook users' general interests in Iran and New Zealand. Comparing the most popular pages shows the pattern of the distribution of Facebook users among different fields in both countries.

4.5.3 Choosing 50 most popular pages in each country and comparing the distribution of the pages in different fields – sampling and process

To choose the most popular pages, the website *socialbakers.com* was used. *Socialbakers.com* is a website that produces up-to-date information about different social media platforms in different countries. The data shown on this website was cross-referenced with the Facebook pages it references to confirm their accuracy, and frequent checking showed that the presented data on the website is correct and reliable. Then, the pages were categorised based on the main interest of the page and, finally, these distributions in Iran and New Zealand were compared. The popularity of pages was ranked according to the number of page members. The fields of interest and activity of the pages were identified using Facebook's own categories, however, to make it more meaningful for the study some categories were combined, or new categories

added, to show more necessary details. Facebook has a system of categorization, and page owners choose a category for their page when they create it. The categories offered by Facebook are art, local business, brand, entertainment, cause or community, company or institution. However, sometimes the Facebook categories do not reflect some details that are relevant for this research. For example, in Iran many popular pages are owned by musicians, while in another country actors may be more popular on Facebook, so categorizing all these pages under the code 'art' or 'celebrities' does not reflect the importance of music among Iranian Facebook users. In addition, for business and commercials, Facebook has three different detailed categories, which do not add new information to this study. For this research, the method used to categorise these pages included identifying the page owner and the field of the page activity, then categorising them in ways that were relevant to the study. The final categories used here are music, non-musician celebrities, sports, TV channels or radio, politicians, satire/literature, marketing, news media, TV shows, the country, and social interests. After classifying all pages, descriptive statistical factors were used to explain the distribution of the page and some graphs were prepared to visualise the comparison.

4.5.4 Choosing five popular pages in each country

To observe the activities on Facebook's public pages in each country, five popular pages were chosen using the process explained above, with reference to a number of conditions. First, the five chosen pages had to represent the distribution of popular pages in different fields of interests. However, a complete achievement of this goal is not easy. Applying this to popular pages in Iran was not difficult because there are not many countries in which Persian is the dominant language, so, the pages that are popular in Iran and use the Persian language are mainly used by Iranian users. In the case of New Zealand, because of the dominance of English language in the country, finding pages which are popular in New Zealand, and of which the majority of users were from New Zealand, was complicated, and this factor limited

the options of popular pages in New Zealand. Furthermore, to have a more valid comparison and reduce the effect of the popularity of pages, it was important that the average of popularity of the chosen pages for each country be similar or close to each other. For example, it was not justifiable to compare the five popular pages in Iran with the popularity rank 1-5 with the five popular pages in New Zealand with the popularity rank of 46-50. Of the Facebook pages chosen, the average popularity rank in Iran was 11.6 while in New Zealand it was 10.4, which is not a big difference. Considering all these conditions, the following five pages from each country were chosen:

Table 1: The chosen Facebook Pages in Iran and New Zealand

NEW ZEALAND	**RANK**	**IRAN**	**RANK**
WHITTAKER'S	5	MANOTO	1
KFC	7	SHADMEHR	2
SHORTLAND ST	10	EBI	3
STUFF.CO.NZ	11	RADIO FARDA	20
COUNTDOWN	19	BOMB E KHANDE	32

4.5.5 The chosen pages from New Zealand Facebook

In New Zealand, the Facebook pages used for this research are: The New Zealand Chocolate brand 'Whittaker's', which has the popularity rank of five. 'KFC New Zealand', which has the rank of seven in popularity for New Zealand users. This is the localised page of the international fast food brand KFC. The third 'Shortland Street', a daily television drama that has been produced and screened in New Zealand since 1992 has the rank of 10. The next page chosen is the Facebook page of 'stuff.co.nz' (formerly Fairfax), which is one of the two

commercial news publishers in New Zealand and which has the popularity rank of 11. The fifth is for the supermarket chain 'Countdown', which has the rank of 19 in popularity.

4.5.6 The chosen pages from Iran Facebook

The most popular Facebook page among Iranian users at the time of sampling was for 'Manoto', a Persian TV channel broadcast from London. The second was for 'Shadmehr Aghile', a musician (singer and composer) who lives outside Iran. The next is also for a musician who lives abroad, 'Ebi'. The forth Facebook page chosen for Iran is 'Radio Farda', a Persian radio broadcast from the United States, which is financially supported by the U.S government. The last page is 'Bomb e Khande' which is focused on sharing jokes and satire mostly about social or political topics within Iran. The page sometimes shares posts that are about other countries but relates them to Iran and compares them to the current situation in Iran in a humorous way. This page had the popularity rank of 32.

4.5.7 Sampling from comments and reactions

These popular pages were analysed to identify user activity such as liking, sharing, commenting, and replying to comments, in order to compare the way Iranian and New Zealand users engage with Facebook pages and each other. The chosen Facebook public pages were observed for the period of two weeks and all activities on these pages were recorded. To identify a period for observation of those Facebook activities it was important that they should not be affected by a factor such as an election, or a terrorist attack, or a catastrophe (Yang, 2008), which could produce unusual forms of behaviour. The period of 14-28 June 2016 was chosen for observing selected pages and collecting data about users' activities and communications. Posts on these pages are mainly posted by the page administrators, and the page members participate by liking, sharing, commenting on a post, or replying to a comment. In total, 11,350 comments and replies to comments were published on the observed pages and

all of these comments were coded and analysed to compare the quantity and quality of online communication on the pages by Iranians and New Zealanders. To analyse and compare these activities some descriptive statistical indexes such as frequency and average were used. Four codes were used to code these comments or replies. These codes have been extracted from the basic characteristics of an ideal conversation in a public sphere as discussed in Chapter 3. The applied codes were: whether the comments are understandable to the page members; related to the discussion topic; only emoticons; or if they insult or suppress other participants in the discussion.

4.6 Document review

To compare the macro-scale political, economic and technological infrastructure conditions in Iran and New Zealand, the study used different resources which provide and publish data about political, social, economic, and cultural conditions in different countries. The Global Innovation Index (GII) is an annual report published with the co-operation of INSED (an institution in Cornell University) and the World Intellectual Property Organization as well as some other institutions (Matthews & Brueggemann, 2015). This report represents basic structural data about different countries drawn from other organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union, World Bank and World Economic Forum (Bank, 2010). Another source was 'The Social Progress Index 2017', which is an annual report about 54 basic human needs as indexes of well-being and opportunity for progress in different countries. The report is published by the non-profit Social Progress Imperative Organization, and is based on ideas presented by Amartya Sen, Douglass North, and Joseph Stiglitz who think of well-being beyond just economic factors. They argue that other social factors such as health and environment play a significant role in well-being (socialprogress.org, 2018). In addition, the website *nationmaster.com* was used to collect more data about the compared countries. *Nationmaster.com* was established by Luke Metcalfe and presents data about

geopolitics, economics, geography, and culture, collected from other formal data production resources and it compares countries side by side. The next resource of data about Iran and New Zealand in this study was the website *theglobaleconomy.com* which is designed to prepare economic index data for researchers or investors that need information about different countries. The main resources of the presented data on this website are the published reports by formal organizations or governments (*theglobaleconomy.com*, 2018b). World Development Indicators, which is published by the World Bank, collects and analyses data and estimations about different regions and nations. Lastly, the webpage *data.worldbank.org* was used in this study as a source of data about Iran and New Zealand. Produced by the databank of the World Bank, it is an online tool to visualise data about different countries. This webpage allows users to create their own tables, charts, or maps and print or publish them online.

4.7 Interview – sampling and process

To collect data about the feelings and opinions of tertiary student Facebook users about the influence of the political and economic situation, interviewing some Iranian and New Zealand students was part of the study design. Five New Zealanders and five Iranian students who were studying and living in New Zealand were interviewed face-to-face. All interviews took place in the library of the University of Canterbury and each interview took around 30-45 minutes and was recorded as an audio file. It would have been impossible to interview Iranian tertiary students in Iran, so the Iranian participants were students who had recently arrived to study at the University of Canterbury. They were asked to talk about their experience of living and using Facebook inside Iran rather than in New Zealand. To recruit the interview participants the project was introduced to some classes at the University of Canterbury, and an advertisement was posted on the Facebook page of the University of Canterbury Students'

Association, the ‘UCSA noticeboard’. To find enough Iranian participants some of them were recruited by other participants, and contacted the researcher to participate.

4.8 Survey – sampling and process

A survey was used to collect more data about other aspects of Facebook use. The online questionnaire was designed and uploaded to the website ‘Qualtrics’ with University of Canterbury branding. After advertising the questionnaire and introducing the questionnaire to the students in Iran and New Zealand, it became apparent that the website was blocked in Iran and students did not have access to the questionnaire. The website *surveymonkey.com* which could be an alternative option was also blocked. Finally, 35 questionnaires were printed and completed by tertiary students in Iran. In New Zealand, the respondents for the survey were identified in a similar process to the interviews, by introducing the project in classes and on the UCSA noticeboard as well as participants introducing the project to their friends. In Iran, the project was introduced to some students and friends and they introduced the project to their friends who possibly were interested in participating. They were given a questionnaire via email, which they could print and share with people who showed their interest in participating.

4.9 Data analysis

Each step of the study required different techniques of data analysis. The analysis combined statistical and qualitative methods, including qualitative content analysis, discourse analysis, and grounded theory.

Content analysis: Content analysis was used to analyse the quality of online communication on the selected Facebook pages. Four codes were used to code comments and replies. Then the frequency of these codes was compared between Iranian and New Zealand Facebook users

to gauge the quantity and quality of the online communication. These codes derived from the characteristics of a public sphere, as discussed in Chapter 3, and the results of the analysis are presented in Chapter 6.

Discourse analysis: Facebook, similar to other media platforms, can be a battlefield for alternative discourses. The form of this battlefield is the result of the relationships between the structure of Facebook, which include Facebook's company policies, the Facebook interface, the infrastructure of the Internet in a country, and the users of Facebook. Facebook users could be corporations or organizations, or individual regular users. While the Facebook Company and the state play a particular role in providing and forming the structures of using Facebook, corporations or celebrities plus regular Facebook users are the main users of Facebook.

This study used Foucauldian discourse analysis to analyse how these elements play their role in the connection between the dominant discourse and power relations in the society, and how the final shape of using Facebook could be influenced by these interactions. In a Foucauldian definition of discourse, as explained in Chapter 3, the relationship between knowledge and power is central. The interaction between aspects of how Facebook is used in a society was analysed according to their role in producing power or knowledge, and how the produced power and knowledge were related to the dominant or alternative discourses. To explore these relationships, the study analysed various documents such as Facebook policies as well as the state policies and published news, and drew on the observation of the popular Facebook pages in Iran and New Zealand discussed above. Furthermore, in the interviews, some questions referred to different aspects of this analysis to collect more data. A central concept in Foucauldian explanation of a discourse is resistance. Foucault argues that resistance always

exists with power and wherever there is power there is resistance (Heller, 1996). This means that a Foucauldian model of discourse should always consider resistance as well as the interaction between power and knowledge. Therefore, the process of resistance, as an inseparable part of a Foucauldian definition of discourse, was analysed for Facebook in Iran and New Zealand. In this stage of the study, data collection was not limited to the five selected pages and the observation time period discussed above, and all detected pieces of data from popular pages, which could improve the quality of analysis, were added to the study. For example, the Facebook page of the popular supermarket, PAK'nSAVE, was added to the study here. The added pages for observation had to be in a similar field as the pages that had been chosen in the sample. For example, PAK'nSAVE is a supermarket which is active in the same field as Countdown, or McDonald's as a fast-food shop is in a similar field to KFC. These popular pages were observed and reviewed to clarify the initial findings of this phase of the study after the period used for the content analysis.

Descriptive statistics: This method was used to analyse the results of the survey as well as the content analysis. Statistical factors such as average and standard deviation were used to analyse the surveys. Since this is a qualitative study and there was no intention to generalise the result, as well as the limited number of questionnaires which was mainly the result of the internet accessibility problems in Iran, more advanced statistical techniques such as comparing means between the two groups of Facebook users have not been applied.

Analysing the interviews (thematic analysis): all interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and imported to the qualitative analysis software NVivo. The researcher transcribed all the interviews to help the process of immersion of the collected data. Then different themes were extracted according to the theoretical framework of the study and the

transcripts were coded based on the themes. During the analysis, listening to the audio files again could help the researcher to understand the context of the words and the transcriptions. Finally, the results of the interviews for Iranian and New Zealand participants were compared.

4.10 Triangulation

All research methods have advantages and disadvantages, which may affect the quality of the research findings. Triangulation enables the researcher to improve the quality of the research findings. Triangulation, as Bryman (2004) argues, Triangulation is about applying a few research approaches in parallel to augment the accuracy of findings.

According to Denzin (2012), triangulation could be done in four main ways: methodological triangulation, which refers to applying different methods to collect and analyse data about the research question; researcher triangulation, which is using more than one researcher to study one research question; theoretical triangulation, which means using different theoretical perspectives to study one topic; and data triangulation, which refers to collecting data in different situations. This study applies multiple methods to study each aspect of how Facebook is used in Iran and New Zealand. In each stage of the study, at least two different methods, such as interview and observation, have been applied to improve the quality of the findings.

4.11 Ethical considerations

Participants' privacy is one of the biggest ethical concerns in social studies (Madge, 2007) and there is an important question that appears with the Internet and new forms of publicly available data about whether researchers can use it without the consent of social media users (Boyd & Crawford, 2012). The appearance of the Internet has opened a window to new topics for study as well as a rich data resource for scholars (Gosling et al., 2004; Ritchie et al., 2013;

Eysenbach & Wyatt, 2002). In addition, there are debates on issues such as how researchers should protect the participants' identities (Madge, 2007). Informed consent is an important part of all studies that involve humans as subjects (Flick, 2016), and achieving informed consent from participants is part of a usual procedure of research in social science. According to Kleinsman and Buckley (2015), informed consent is about giving enough information about different aspects of the study to the potential participant. For example, the participant should be aware they are participating in research and be informed about the study procedures and all possible risks or benefits of the study. However, the situation for using available online data is more complicated and, in some cases, it is not easy to find agreement among researchers about ethical approaches (Hewson, 2003; Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011). For example: in the case of text published on public pages, there is no agreement among scholars about whether or not obtaining the author's consent is required. Some scholars believe that publicly published texts on the Internet are cultural products rather than human subjects and obtaining the author's consent is not required, however, researchers should consider the author's privacy (Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011). The Association of the Internet Research (AOIR) has suggested that if participants are considered subjects of the study, for example, people in chat rooms, then a high confidentiality is necessary, however, if people are the writers of texts, such as weblogs, then a lesser degree of confidentiality is required (Madge, 2007).

4.11.1 Ethical issues around researching Facebook

Social networking websites offer many opportunities and tools for research, but the issues noted above create ethical challenges for researchers (Moreno et al., 2013). Managing personal privacy is a big challenge for Facebook users, and this is one of the most researched issues about using Facebook (Joinson, 2008; Liu et al., 2011; Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Debatin et al., 2009). Zimmer (2010) suggests that many Facebook users do not know how to manage their privacy, particularly as changes in the tools for controlling privacy on Facebook could be

difficult to understand, and scholars should be aware of the threats that these changes can have for anonymizing the data. An interdisciplinary research team can help to review and predict the ethical issues of a data collection project to avoid these dangers. Moreno et al. (2013) classify Facebook studies as observational, interactive, or utilizing surveys or interviews. They argue that for observational studies informed consent is not necessary under some circumstances such as when the information is identifiable but not private, and information gathering requires no interaction with the person who posted it online, and presumably the proposed project does not constitute the human subjects' research.

On the other hand, some scholars such as Boyd and Crawford argue that although it is not necessary for researchers to obtain consent for every usage of public data, the researcher needs to justify the ethical aspect of data collection, and because something is available publicly it does not mean everybody can use it (Boyd & Crawford, 2012). In addition, according to Kosinski et al. (2015), although Facebook allows users to manage their privacy, ultimately the researcher and ethics review committees need to decide whether collecting data from what Facebook users have shared is ethical.

Although there are some different opinions around using online data, the common recognizable point in all opinions is the safety of the human subjects and protecting people who share the data from possible future harm. This is the main concern of the Human Research Ethics Committee in the University of Canterbury, which reviewed this research to make sure that all concerns around human subjects who may be involved in this study, directly or indirectly, have been considered. Part of the data for this study is collected from public Facebook pages rather than personal pages, the data has been anonymised and all names and other identifications have been removed from what was analysed and presented in

this thesis. However, there are some photos in the thesis containing anonymised comments. To add the interview and questionnaire to the study, the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury approved the second application also. All participants in the interview and the survey were informed about the nature of the study and their rights, and their consents were gained before they started to answer the questions. In both the English and Persian versions of the questionnaire the process of the study was explained, however, the present studies on Facebook, as discussed in Chapter 2, indicate that researching Facebook in Iran is not rare. In addition, in the process of designing the questions the situation and possible concerns of Iranian respondents were considered. Although it is always necessary for researchers to consider the concerns and limitations of their respondents before asking questions, because a main part of this study is about politics, to design the questions of Iranian respondents, in both questionnaire and interview, it was crucial to consider the users' situations in Iran and use moderate words and questions rather than sensitive words which could cause concern for respondents.

4.12 Limitations of the study

Similar to all social studies, this study has some limitations. There are several limitations of this study:

- The scarcity of prior studies: It was not easy to find many studies that have directly compared the use of Facebook in different countries with reference to contextual factors such as political or economic factors. The majority of Facebook studies in this area deal with personal or micro aspects of Facebook use or remain limited to one social context.

- Cultural limitations: These are the limitations of understanding the meaning and interpretation of Facebook texts. The first major cultural barrier relates to language, and particularly the informal form of New Zealand English, which is usually used on Facebook pages, where many expressions and reactions were not easily understandable to the researcher as a non-native English speaker. The existing gap between the researcher's understanding of Iranian culture and New Zealand culture can be a potential source of bias in the study. However, the knowledge and experience of New Zealanders who were available to answer the questions was a solution to reduce this problem.

- Sampling limitations: This study faced sampling problems in different steps of the study. To choose the popular Facebook pages in New Zealand, as discussed above, the number of Facebook pages that were popular among New Zealanders and which also met the research requirements was very limited. While Iranian Facebook users use Persian, New Zealand Facebook users use English, which is the dominant language in other countries with big populations. The domination of the English language has resulted in the popularity of many pages among New Zealand Facebook users on which they are not the dominant group of page members. Another sampling limitation was about sampling Iranian students who participated in the survey. In New Zealand, students who were interested in completing the survey could go to the website and complete the questionnaire, while in Iran the website was blocked, and students could not open the website. Therefore, they needed to complete a printed questionnaire, which can affect the similarity of the students who participated in completing the questionnaires.

- Time limitations: These include two types of limitation: the limitations in choosing the right time for observation, and the time limitation of the study. The problematic point of choosing the observation time was choosing a time when no special or big event was happening that could affect normal Facebook activities in Iran and New Zealand. It was not easy to find the same duration for both countries, especially for Iran where, as a Middle Eastern country, it always possible that unexpected conditions affect Facebook activities. For example, at the end of 2019, because of the protests in Iran, the government shut down the whole Internet in the country for a week.

It is likely that these limitations, such as cultural barriers, are factors that make cross-national social studies more challenging than social studies on a national scale and prevent many scholars from approaching cross-national studies.

The next chapter is devoted to presenting the results of the analysis of the political economy of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand.

5 Political Economy of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand

5.1 Introduction

A political economy approach to communication is a critical perspective that deals with the effect of social relations, and especially power relations, on manufacturing, delivering and using media content (Fuchs, 2015a). As Mansell (2004) states, it is important to explore how social media reflect both social values and the controlling system of the society. Fuchs sees the political economy of communication as an interaction between three elements: media regulators, which usually are political forces or media owners; media content producers; and media content distributors. He argues that the importance of financial resources as well as political regulation in producing and distributing media can highlight the role of politicians, celebrities, experts, and managers, rather than regular citizens (Fuchs, 2014).

This thesis takes a political economy approach to analysing the process of producing, distributing and consuming media content on Facebook in Iran and New Zealand, to analyse how different dominant social powers influence this process. It addresses regulation, content production, and content distribution on Facebook. Accordingly, in analysing the political economy of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand, the following question should be answered:

- What is the influence of politics and the economy on the regulation as well as the process of producing and distributing content on Facebook in Iran and New Zealand?

This chapter addresses this question by drawing on interviews, survey responses, and an analysis of Facebook pages. To answer these questions different methods of collecting data

and analysis have been applied and combined. The first 50 most popular Facebook pages in Iran and New Zealand have been categorised and compared. In addition, some Iranian and New Zealand students have been interviewed and, in addition, some more have been surveyed via a questionnaire. The details of these research methods were explained in Chapter 4.

5.2 Who regulates Facebook in Iran and New Zealand

McChesney (2015) believes that economic and political systems play an important role in regulating media in societies. Ciaglia (2013) also argues that structural differences in political power can lead to different strategies for controlling media in a society. In general, three main factors influence Facebook's regulation in Iran and New Zealand, which will be discussed in more detail below:

- Facebook's company as the owner of the Facebook platform.
- Local laws about using Facebook in Iran and New Zealand.
- Management rules of Facebook pages, which could be applied by the owner or the manager of a personal or public page.
-

5.2.1 Facebook as a company

Fuchs (2015) has claimed that both the government and the market play roles in controlling the Internet. This means there are two sources that can affect the situation of Facebook in a country. First, the government of the country; governments usually consider the political and economic situation of the country to regulate using the Internet and Facebook. Secondly, Facebook's company is a capitalist company which competes in the market to maximise its profit. Siapera (2017) says that Facebook is a capitalist company which is based in the United States of America. The focus of this section is on the capitalist identity of Facebook, which plays a crucial role in understanding the company regulations. Although Facebook introduces the same terms of use for using Facebook all over the world, US policy has an identifiable

impact on how the Facebook company treats different countries or political groups. The effect of the US on the discourse of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

As a capitalist company, the goal of Facebook is to maximize its financial profit, and one of the main ways of increasing profit is by selling the visibility of the content produced and shared by users. For example, Facebook users are able to buy more visibility for their produced content. This means the visibility of the shared content on Facebook can be determined by capitalistic rules, and Facebook users with more financial strength are more able to make their messages visible, and usually companies, celebrities, and organizations have more resources to make themselves visible on Facebook.

For this part of the study, when the interviewees were questioned about their experience of commercial usage of Facebook, by themselves or companies, most mentioned the way companies and celebrities can buy visibility. One of the aspects that they mentioned was that when they buy or search for something online, they start getting more and more related offers and advertisements about that thing on Facebook, however, in many cases they were not happy about receiving more advertisements on their Facebook page. According to *www.brandwatch.com*, 75% of brands pay Facebook to promote their advertisements and be more visible to other Facebook users. In 2015, Facebook earned 19% of the whole world's mobile advertisements' profits, which was 70 billion dollars (*brandwatch.com*, 2016). Facebook not only sells the visibility of the messages but also targets potential consumers as the audience for corporations' messages. According to *www.brandwatch.com*, 40% of Facebook users have not liked any brand page, however, they still receive messages and

advertisements from different brands because these brands are able to pay money to Facebook and become more visible on Facebook.

To summarise, the Facebook Company follows a capitalist rule, which is based on the importance of maximizing the company profit, selling the visibility of messages and targeting audiences for other corporations. My interviews show that most participants had been aware of the process of selling visibility by Facebook, however, they didn't use this term for it.

5.2.2 Facebook and the law in Iran and New Zealand

There are major differences between the regulation of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand, as the result of fundamental differences in the dominant political systems in these countries. While in New Zealand using Facebook is free and people can use the website without legal barriers, using Facebook in Iran is complicated as it is neither legal nor illegal. Before the Green Movement in 2009, which was a political protest against the government, Facebook's website was not blocked in Iran; however, after the remarkable role that Facebook played in the protests, the Iranian government blocked access to the website. When a Facebook user inside Iran types a Facebook address in the browser, a page will appear indicating that the website is blocked by the government; it is the same for Twitter, YouTube and many other websites, however, this does not mean that using these websites is illegal. Accessing the website requires a way to bypass the blockage, such as using anti-filter software or a VPN, and that is illegal. Yet, many regular Iranian people, as well as Iranian politicians, use these blocked websites. For example, when in 2018 one of the lawyer members of 'The Guardian Council' of Iran was questioned about his use of Twitter in spite of it being blocked by the government, he answered that Twitter is blocked but using it is not illegal (BBC.com, 2018).

Some politicians can use the unfiltered Internet and use websites that are blocked to other people.

Figure 14: The usual page which appears to inform users that the website is blocked in Iran

Despite being blocked, Facebook is one of the most popular social networking websites among the general public in Iran and this popularity persuades politicians to use Facebook to reach more people.

The use of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand has been deeply influenced by the way that political powers approach Facebook in each of these countries. In New Zealand, Facebook is a space where in addition to ordinary people, social institutions, corporations, and different organizations represent themselves, whereas in Iran Facebook is mainly used by ordinary individuals, and social institutions or organizations are not active on Facebook. Accessing Facebook in Iran requires using an anti-filter and breaching the dominant law, therefore even opening a Facebook page could have a symbolic political meaning of ignoring the

government's desire (McLaren, 1999), while in New Zealand using Facebook is a normal activity like any other.

One of the interviewees explains why in Iran, despite of the popularity of Facebook, most businesses prefer not to be involved in any online activities on Facebook.

> If you have a legal personality like a corporation, like an organization, and you make a Facebook page, unlike the private sector, that would be a problem for you. They do not use it (Facebook) because they know it is banned and they do not want to be called by court… (IR3).

The interviewee points out the importance of unstated laws for how companies in Iran avoid using Facebook:

> Maybe be there isn't any law stated … but what the government desires gets enforced … and they [the government] say that we're using is sort of rules [means we like this sort of behaviour], but I know that tweeter [*sic*] also is illegal, but some officials use that as like Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister (IR3).

While in Iran most organizations and companies stay away from Facebook, companies in New Zealand experience a different condition. The connection between Facebook users and businesses in New Zealand is very clear from the interviews. The interviewees have mentioned two main points about why they follow businesses online. One is to continue their connections and good experiences with companies and receive information about them. For instance, an interviewee talks about their relationship with these businesses like this:

> Maybe because people feel a connection to it. Like you might … like on Facebook, I follow a New World [supermarket], because it's my local […] And I go there a lot and I'm interested in what they might be promoting. Then I probably just clicked like, […] it

> plays a […] reasonably positive function in my life. You know, it makes it easy for me to get food (NZ3).

However, this interviewee believes that this connection usually does not happen with small businesses:

> Again, it's that connection thing. But I guess for smaller businesses, you do not use them often enough to have a connection, Like I follow a local play centre because we go there twice a week. And so that's an important part of my world. And I want to know what's going on in it (NZ3).

While interviewee NZ3 has a positive feeling about the businesses, another person explains the benefit of following these business pages as just getting information about the current deals that these businesses offer, saying, 'Yeah. Because we see it is part of our life. And maybe just to get advertisements on them. And if they have something special (NZ1).'

The second reason is because they feel these brands are part of their identities. Another participant has mentioned this reason, as below:

> I think definitely in New Zealand consumer culture, there's a big love of sales, giving a bargain. And I think a lot of people like being the first to know about a bargain or getting the information straight from the source. And I guess also in New Zealand kiwi culture, if you could call it such a thing, definitely a lot of people are going to have a really strong attachment to brands, especially New Zealand brands…. New Zealand and so the kiwi brand, so I guess that's one reason why someone might see a brand page on Facebook and be like, Oh, yeah, go New Zealand. I suppose Whittaker's is another example... (NZ5).

5.2.3 Facebook page managers

Reviewing the popular Facebook pages in Iran and New Zealand reveals obvious differences in the management style of the pages. The main difference is that most of the page managers in Iran appear to be amateur while in New Zealand the corporations that own the popular pages usually hire page managers. In New Zealand, professional page administrators manage pages more strictly by directing discussion on the page, deleting users' comments that are not related to the page's agenda, and keeping the pages clean of negative points. However, in Iran public fan-page managers do not seem to apply any strategy to filter the comments before or after they become published on the page. An interviewee expressed their experience of managing pages for big companies rather than small companies:

> I think, obviously, the smaller businesses, I guess [are] a little bit more personal because from experience when I've messaged someone from one of their businesses, you're talking to a real person … I guess all the PAK'nSAVE [big companies] Facebook pages they're either run by robots like [an] automatic system, or I guess have employed like a marketing person to take care of all of that stuff…(NZ1).

In addition, in New Zealand, page managers keep the members engaged with the page by suggesting a discussion topic or presenting a question to users, which is a common technique that professional online marketing managers use to increase user engagement (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). It is evident that in Iran, page managers rarely apply any special strategy to engage the users, indicating that the page managers are not generally trained as professionals. The pictures below show examples of how page managers work to manage pages by developing regulations. First, they give a particular topic to users to write about it, in this case, classic English foods. Secondly, they warn users that their comments might be deleted if the page manager considers the comment to be not related to the topic. Finally, it is clearly stated that the 'Customer Care' team of the company will receive the questions from

Facebook and answer them, which shows that managing the Facebook page is part of the teamwork of professionals.

Figure 15: Political economy - example 1

The picture below shows one of the most popular Iranian Facebook pages, which is the fan page of a famous Iranian singer. Many of the comments on the page are not only against the singer but also insulting him, indicating that the page manager does not review the comments or does not manage the page strictly.

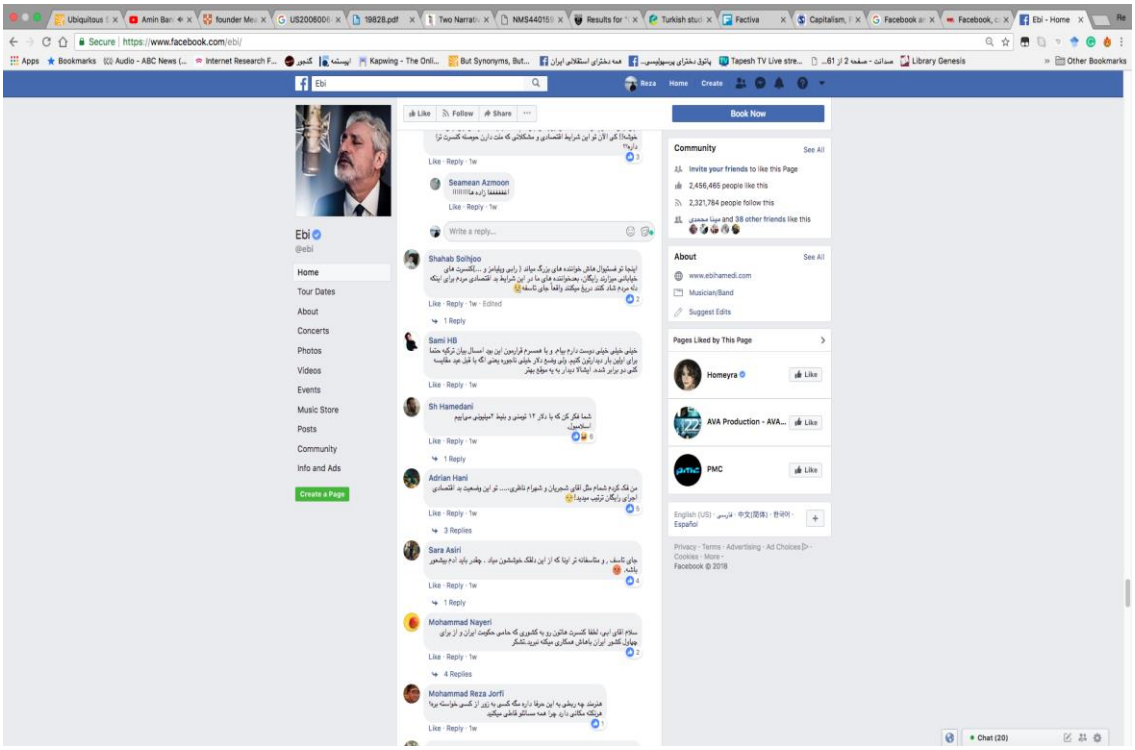


Figure 16: Political economy – example 2

These differences show that in Iran page managers do not have a very strong role in regulating pages. While in New Zealand the popular public pages are usually managed and regulated by professional managers who strictly maintain the pages, in Iran page managers do not play a very active role in regulating pages.

In summary, the three elements of Facebook regulation are: the Facebook Company, the government, and the page managers. In New Zealand, the government does not, or tries not to, play a strong role in managing Facebook and gives freedom to the other elements to play their role. While in Iran, by blocking Facebook, the government overshadows the role of the other elements in managing Facebook.

5.3 Who Produces Facebook Content in Iran and New Zealand?

Facebook pages can be either personal or public. Personal Facebook pages are accessible privately to users for sharing their ideas, photos, videos and other materials with a limited

circle of friends, while public pages are accessible to all users who are interested in the page's agenda for sharing their ideas with other page members. Facebook groups can be closed, which means if someone is interested in joining the group they should send a request to the page administrator and the administrator then adds them to the group. Public page administrators sometimes choose to have a closed group as it makes the process of the management easier for them, and if a group has been made for a closed circle of users or friends, in this study it is not considered to be public. One major difference between personal and public pages is the size of the audience that they can reach. In general, the mean and median of the people in a Facebook friends list is 338 and 200, respectively (bigthink.com, 2017), indicating that half of regular Facebook users have less than 200 friends who can see their shared posts and materials, however, public pages in Iran have millions, and in New Zealand hundreds of thousands, of users who potentially can see the posts on these pages. Activities such as sharing and commenting on posts, can mean the visibility and effectiveness of a post on Facebook's public pages multiplies. Although personal Facebook users generate the majority of Facebook content, this is not usually the most visible Facebook content. The main question is, then: who owns the most popular pages in Iran and New Zealand and produces the most effective and visible Facebook content? The table below depicts the distribution of the 50 most popular public pages in Iran and New Zealand as at June 2016, however, checking more pages shows that the page distribution pattern remains similar for the first 500 most popular Facebook pages.

Table 2: The distribution of the interest fields of the popular Facebook pages in Iran and New Zealand

Country	Music	Celeb	TV channels or Radio	Sport	Politicians	Lit/Joke	Marketing	News media	TV show	Country/ Social interest
Iran	29	3	7	4	1	6	0	0	0	0
NZ	5	4	1	4	0	2	20	3	8	3

The table shows that among the top 50 popular Facebook pages, in Iran the majority (58%) of pages are related to music and musicians, but in New Zealand the majority (40%) of pages are related to marketing and commerce. Also, among the reviewed Facebook pages from Iran, there is no page related to marketing. Another obvious difference between Iran and New Zealand is that seven Facebook pages for television channels are popular among Iranian Facebook users, however, New Zealand Facebook users like eight specific TV shows rather than TV channels. Another point reflected in the table is about news resources on Facebook. While Iranians are interested in television news channels such as BBC Persian or Voice of America (VOA), which are broadcast from outside Iran and usually distribute news that is censored by the Iranian government, New Zealanders like news media such as *stuff.co.nz* or *NZherald.co.nz*, which are legally active in New Zealand. Iranian and New Zealand Facebook users have the same amount of interest in sports; however, Iranian users have a bigger interest in literature, especially poetry, as one of the most important bases of Iranian culture, or in jokes and satire. Iranian users, compared to zero pages for New Zealanders, like six popular pages related to literature. However, New Zealand users like two pages related to satire. There is one page for a politician among the most followed Facebook pages in Iran, while there is no page about politics or related to politicians among the popular Facebook pages in New Zealand. Another clear difference between the popular Facebook pages in Iran and New Zealand is in pages that are related to sharing things about the country, for example what is

good or attractive about New Zealand, or topics about social issues such as protecting nature or animals; there is no page about Iran or Iranian social interests among the most popular pages in Iran Facebook, while there are three popular pages in this field in New Zealand. The graph below depicts the differences in the distribution of popular Facebook public pages in Iran and New Zealand. As the graph shows, the frequency of different categories clearly varies between Iran and New Zealand. However, in some fields like sport, both countries have the same number of popular pages among the top 50 popular pages. The reasons for these differences and even similarities in page distribution will be discussed in future chapters.

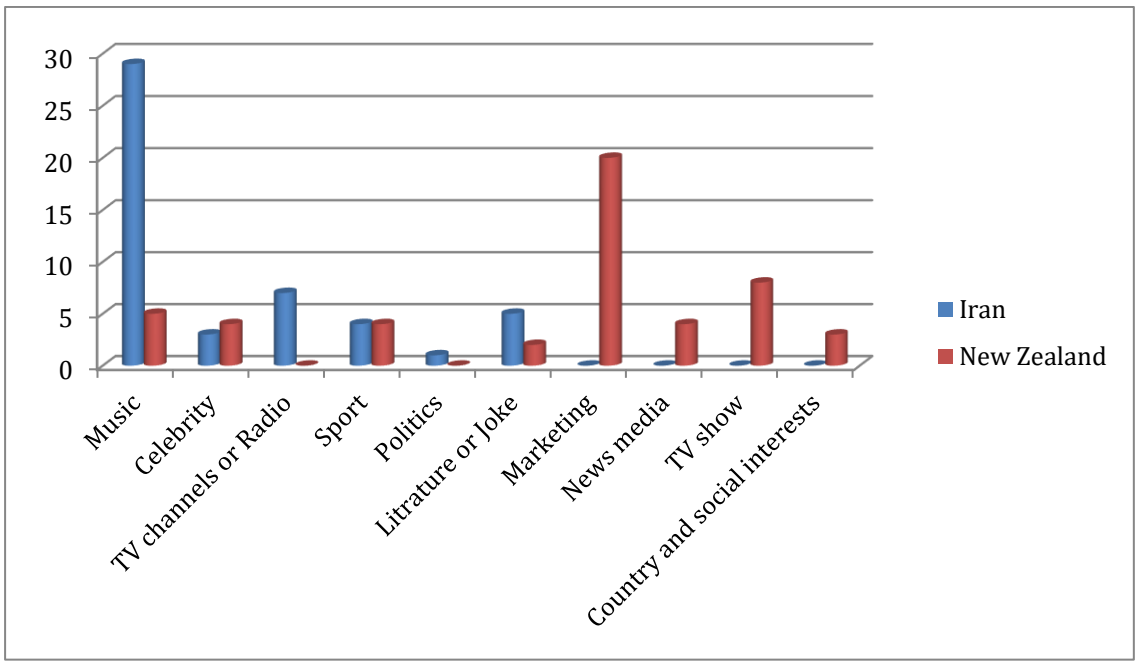


Figure 17: The graph of the distribution of the interest field of

Results from this categorization (shown in Table 2 and Figure 17) show the distribution of the most influential content on Facebook in both countries. In Iran pages that are related to musicians, TV channels, jokes, and literature produce the most common Facebook content. However, in New Zealand, much of the content is produced by marketing companies, TV shows, sports, celebrities, or is partly related to common social interests.

From observing the public pages it was found that there are two main ways for public pages to produce their Facebook content. The first is to have it produced by page managers, who are sometimes hired by the page owners. Although this method is common among most of the corporations in New Zealand, it is very difficult to find people in Iran who manage pages in a professional capacity. This might be because most Iranian popular pages are fan pages and are usually about celebrities who are exiled from Iran, while the page managers live inside the country. Although it is not easy to confirm that Iranian page managers live inside the country, many of the celebrities who own a Facebook public page have asserted that their page managers are inside Iran. Another type of content production occurs through volunteer work; applying a 'digital labour' theoretical approach is useful for analysing this method of content production. Facebook, similar to many other digital media, allows people to use their skills and professions to produce and share media content for free.

5.3.1 Creating new content through the users' skills

Volunteer content creation is particularly evident in fan pages where people use their time and skills to create images, text, video, or any other type of media content to share with others and to promote something that does not bring a profit to them. The images below are examples of how Facebook users use their ability to produce media content to express their joy about a food or support of an artist, while at the same time promoting a brand or person. These examples are about the brands KFC and Whittaker's chocolate in New Zealand, and Ebi and Googoosh, two famous Iranian musicians.

Figure 18: Political economy - example 3

This photo of KFC food appears to be by a regular Facebook user. In this photo, they only show their food rather than themselves, showing their sandwiches and a prominent KFC sign. In the explanation of the photo, they explain the ingredients plus add some emojis to show their love (a hearts emoji) and happiness (a big smile emoji) and what a good time they experience with KFC. While they share this photo with their friends, they also promote KFC, however it is presented as though KFC did not pay them for this promotion, that they are regular users. Some scholars call this type of free work for companies 'digital labour'. Fuchs and Mosco (2015) argue that although social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, give communication opportunities to users for free, they commodify and sell users' personal data as well as the online content which users produce. People who use social media platforms, such as Facebook, usually generate content through updating their statuses, sharing photos and videos, liking or commenting on posts, and playing online games (Beverungen et al., 2015). In addition, Facebook users produce information by spending their time on the Internet to make online social networks and relationships, and leave their online browsing history behind on the Internet; all of this information is ready to be sold to advertising

companies by Facebook or other online companies that employ a user-targeted business model (Ferree et al., 2002).

The photo below is a personal photo of another company's product, Whittaker's chocolate, as another example of free promotion for a business.

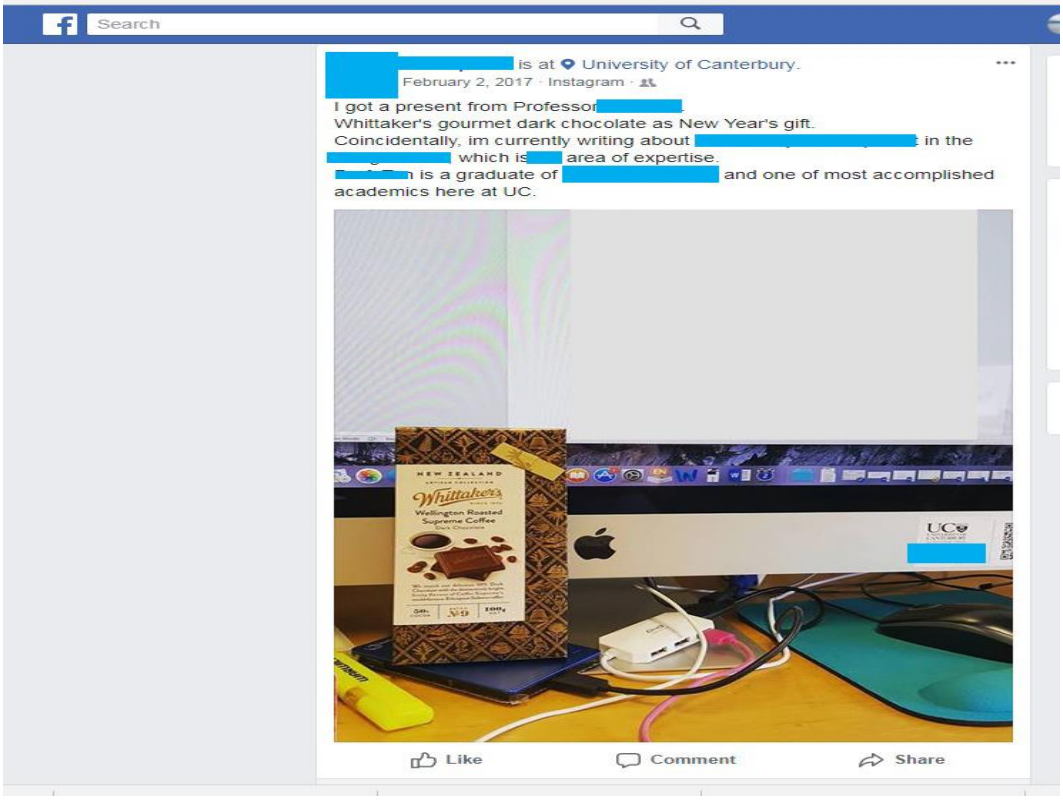


Figure 19: Political economy - example 4

In this photo, a student at the University of Canterbury shares a good moment with his Facebook friends, however, the student highlights the brand of Whittaker's chocolate which has been received as a New Year's gift.

The picture below is made by a fan of an Iranian singer, Ebi, to promote him. This photo includes six tickets for concerts that the creator had possibly attended. This photo shows the

passion and feeling of the person for this musician as well as advertising the quality of his music and concert experience.

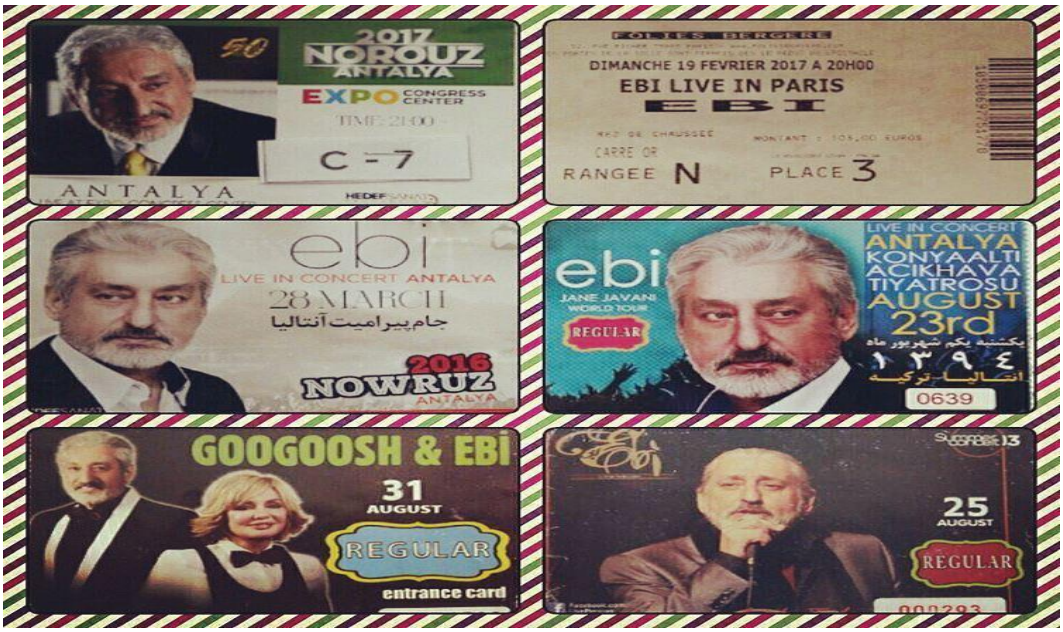


Figure 20: Political economy - example 5

This is another photo of an Iranian singer with some family photos that promote the singer for free.

Figure 21: Political economy - example 6

The photo above is another example of what Iranian Facebook users have produced to show their feelings towards a singer. It is a collage of some family photos with photos of an Iranian

singer, Googoosh, which shows that family members from different generations like the singer and have made a cake to celebrate the singer's birthday together. They share their feelings towards the singer on their online network, which could be an advertisement for the singer.

An Iranian interviewee considers these activities as entertainment and a hobby. Before I mentioned that it may a kind of commercial use of Facebook, they had never considered that:

> In our country (Iran), so it does not make any sense that people use it as a way to advertise their job or for a commercial purpose, because [Facebook is] blocked. But I do agree with you. Because when you said that public pages in Iran, well, I have liked those pages, and they're all about movies or celebrities or musicians. And actually, we do not use Facebook for more useful things. It's just for spending time and having it just as a hobby (IR4).

Reviewing public pages in Iran and New Zealand reveals that in Iran most of the pages are fan pages, which normally use fan-made content. In New Zealand, corporations hire managers for their Facebook pages and produce more professional content, however still the role of free user-made content is very apparent. To explore the fact that New Zealand corporations hire online marketing team members to manage their online pages, it is not difficult to find job advertisements from these companies wanting to hire online marketing team members. The photo below is an example of a job advertisement by Countdown and the advertisement explicitly mentions the responsibility of hired people to promote the company on digital media.

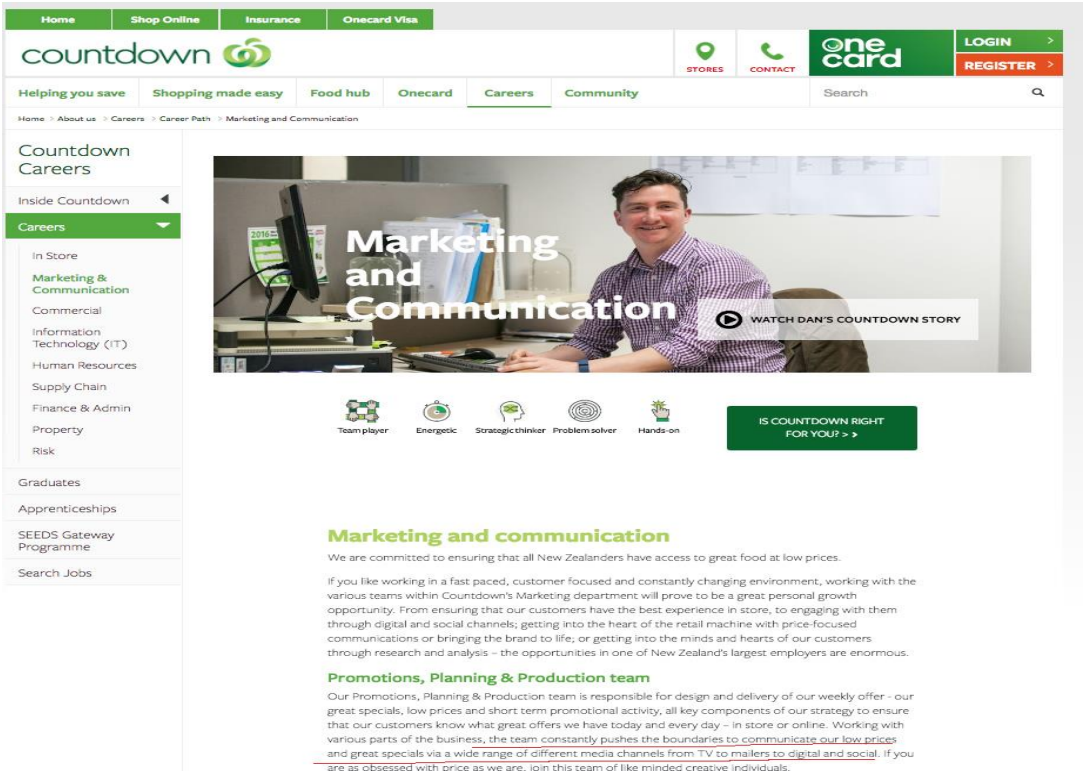


Figure 22: Political economy - example 7

5.4 Who distributes Facebook content?

In a media system, distributing content is as important as producing it. Therefore, it is important for capitalism to apply the best strategies to reach bigger audiences for the produced media content (Manzerolle, 2010). Media content only becomes effective when it is consumed by the audience, and on social media this means when the message is visible to users. There are several ways that Facebook users can see a new message on Facebook: by receiving a message directly, being tagged on a message, because their friend has shared the post, or a Facebook friend has reacted to a Facebook post. Facebook public pages apply different techniques to maximise their audiences and increase the visibility of their messages, as discussed below. In addition, the Facebook algorithm promotes posts with more engagements such as ‘like’, ‘share’, or put a comment on a post. Although the Facebook algorithm gives different values to each one of these activities to decide whether to make them visible to other

users, it systematically increases the chance of posts from popular Facebook pages to become more visible (Kim & Yang, 2017).

5.4.1 Receiving a post directly

Facebook users receive posts directly from public pages in two ways. First, by following public pages. Facebook public pages have a big number of followers and each published post on these pages is seen directly by many Facebook users. Public pages usually have managers who produce and share messages regularly. For example, a popular page in Iran may have around two million followers, so new content can immediately be seen by a large number of Facebook users. The second way that many corporations target the potential audiences for the produced messages and expand the range of the receivers is by buying visibility for their messages. As explained above, Facebook uses a targeted advertisement system, which allows advertisers to choose the desired user groups as the receivers of their message. That is, Facebook shows the messages on users' pages, while users have no control over this process. Although this advertising service is not free, corporations and businesses have enough financial resources to use this service. Given that the majority of popular Facebook pages in New Zealand belong to corporations, it is more likely for popular Facebook pages in New Zealand to buy visibility compared to pages in Iran, which are mainly fan pages for exiled artists without big financial resources.

In the survey the respondents answered a question about how often they receive messages or advertisements from companies. They could choose somewhere on a scale of 1-5. The number 1 showed that they always get advertisements on Facebook and 5 indicated that they never see advertisements on their Facebook page. The tables below show that survey respondents say

that around half the time that they use Facebook they receive information or advertisements on Facebook.

Table 3: How often New Zealand respondents receive information from businesses

Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
2.39	1.43	2.06	33

Table 4: How often Iranian respondents receive information from businesses

Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
4.25	0.43	0.19	34

Although these answers are not statistically generalizable, considering the frequency and the time users spend using Facebook, this highlights the importance of companies and businesses' advertisements as forming a considerable amount of the content on Facebook. In addition to advertisements, different messages that companies share daily with the Facebook users are being received by a big number of users. It is evident in the table that Iranian respondents had received much fewer commercial messages on Facebook than New Zealanders. The difference between standard deviations also shows that the answers among Iranians have been more consistent than from New Zealanders, indicating that Iranian respondents had more coherent ideas about not receiving commercial information and advertisements.

5.4.2 Shared contents from other public pages' members

Another way to receive Facebook content is when a user's Facebook friends share a Facebook post on their Facebook wall. This is a new and key feature of digital media through which the audience can re-produce or re-distribute content easily (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Although reproducing and sharing media has been possible for many forms of old media content, digital media and Facebook have more advanced facilities for this process than other previous forms

of media, which used methods such as copying tapes or video cassettes. Sharing Facebook content has two main advantages over the old media platforms. First, on Facebook reproducing or sharing content can be done by clicking only one button, which is much easier and faster than the old forms of media (Bonsón et al., 2012). In addition, the producers of Facebook public pages often ask users to share their content, however, producers of old media forms asked users not to copy or share their productions (Bagdikian, 2007). Given that Facebook public pages have a large number of followers, many of whom share their favourite posts on their own walls, many people can see the content of public pages even if they do not follow the original public page.

The following examples show how sharing a post from public pages can make a considerable difference to the size of audiences. The post below, from an Iranian popular page for the poet Sohrab Sepehri, has been shared 285 times, and the post from McDonald's, a popular public page in New Zealand, 840 times by users. According to *brandwatch.com*, the average number of friends on Facebook users' lists is 338 and this suggests the McDonald's message potentially had been shared with more than 283,000 people (338*840) by the Facebook user's unpaid labour.

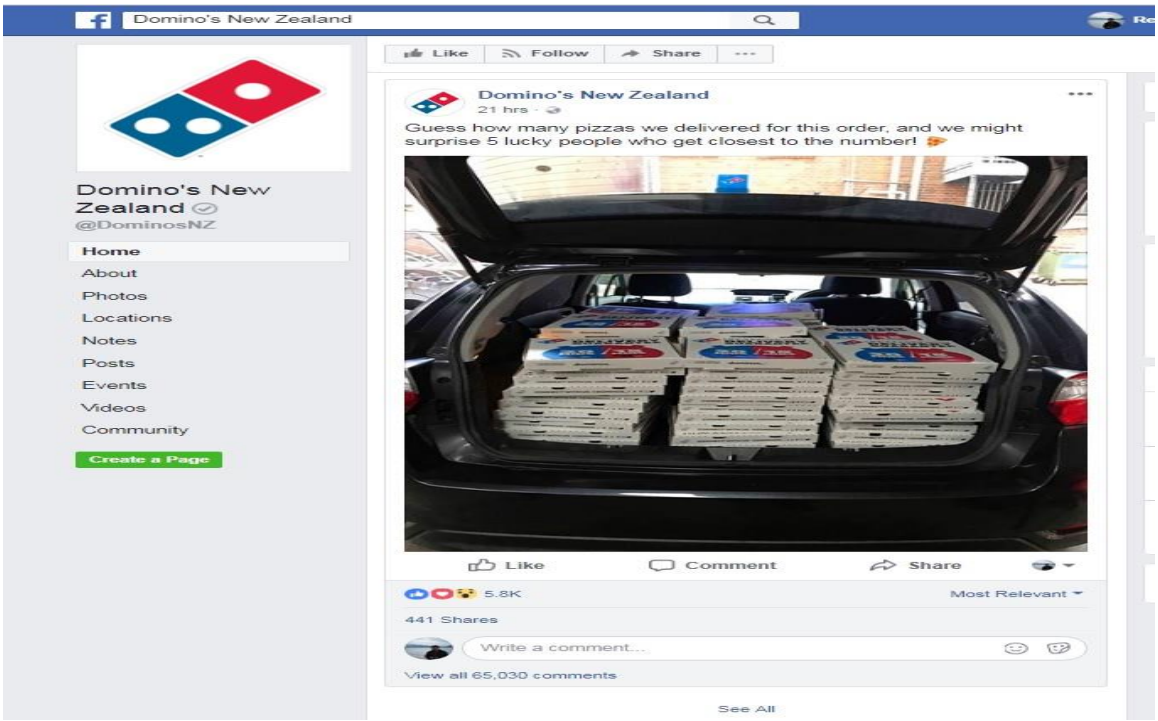
Figure 23: Political economy - example 8

Figure 24: Political economy - example 9

5.4.3 Tagging a friend, liking, or commenting on a post

When another Facebook user, or someone's friend tags someone in a post, the post becomes visible to that user. In some cases, if someone reacts or comments on a post the post becomes

visible to some other Facebook users. Tagging friends is very common on commercial Facebook pages, especially when they offer special services or reduced prices for their services. Commercial pages often ask their followers to tag other Facebook users. The large number of reactions, such as likes and comments, on public-page posts help them to become more visible. For example, the photo below shows a post from the Domino's Pizza Facebook page in New Zealand, which has received more than 65,000 comments and has been shared more than 440 times, hence, many Facebook users who did not even follow this public page could see the post. Asking a question of the users and offering gifts are two of the common techniques to increase the customers' interaction; corporations can use this method because of their financial resources (He et al., 2013). In addition, it can be seen in the photo that some Facebook users have tagged other friends to let them see the message and answer the question presented by the page manager.



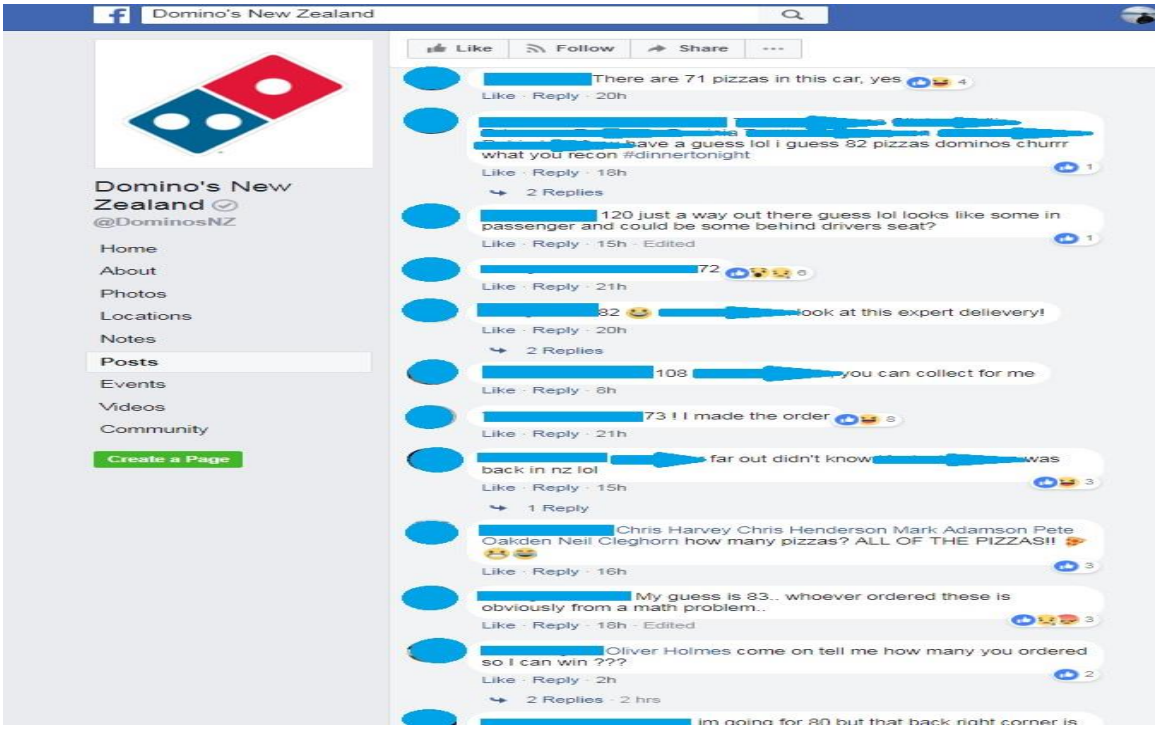


Figure 25: Political economy - example 10

The tables below show how the students who participated in the study react to Facebook's commercial messages in both Iran and New Zealand.

Table 5: The reaction of New Zealand respondents to the commercial posts on Facebook

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Count
1	Liking the post	1.00	5.00	4.12	1.02	34
2	Commenting on the post	4.00	5.00	4.71	0.46	34
3	Re-posting (sharing) the post	1.00	5.00	4.63	0.96	35
4	Replying to a comment on a post	1.00	5.00	4.23	1.02	35

Table 6: The reaction of Iranian respondents to the commercial posts on Facebook

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Count
1	Liking the post	3.00	5.00	4.71	0.47	14
2	Commenting on the post	4.00	5.00	4.78	0.43	14
3	Re-posting (sharing) the post	4.00	5.00	4.92	0.27	14
4	Replying to a comment on a post	4.00	5.00	4.92	0.27	14

As reflected in the tables, the average of respondents' answers in all items is more than four, which means they engage very little with commercial posts in both Iran and New Zealand. Although at first glance the numbers presented in both tables suggest that a small number of the respondents engage with the commercial Facebook messages and like, share, comment or reply to a comment on these messages, considering the differences in standard deviation, which indicates the distribution of answers, this shows that New Zealanders have a bigger standard deviation, or bigger disparity in their answers. It means some of them have chosen answers near 1, which means always engaging with commercial posts. Considering the big population of Facebook users, this reveals that this small percentage of Facebook users still form a large group of people that could be observed in Facebook public pages related to commercials. Table 6 shows that Iranian respondents had less standard deviation than New Zealanders in their answers, which means more Iranian respondents are around the average and not many Iranian respondents engage with commercial posts.

5.5 Summary

The political economy of the media deals with three main aspects of media in a society: media regulation, media content production, and media content distribution. Comparing Iran and New Zealand using the political economy approach finds significant differences in the political economy of Facebook between these two countries. The difference in media

regulation and the relationship between the dominant political power and media of these countries could be considered the core difference in the political economy of Facebook between Iran and New Zealand. Thus, the regulation of Facebook in these countries has resulted in big differences in content production and distribution on Facebook. In general, the comparison between the political economy of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand can be summarized in four points:

- In Iran, access to Facebook has been blocked by the government, which stops corporations and even celebrities who are inside the country from using Facebook to promote their services and increase their profit. However, in New Zealand, many big businesses use the potential of Facebook's popularity to advertise their services, and also extend their influence on people's online life. In fact, these corporations play a big role in shaping Facebook in New Zealand. In other words, while in Iran political power is the only power that attempts to gain control over Facebook and regulate it, in New Zealand the political power, the state, plays a minimal role in regulating Facebook, and businesses' page managers, in addition to the Facebook company, have the main role in shaping the Facebook content.

- In both Iran and New Zealand, people produce content for popular public pages. In New Zealand, the majority of public pages belong to corporations, so the free labour of Facebook users creates benefit for corporations. Similarly, in Iran, the majority of popular pages belong to musicians' fans, therefore the free labour of Facebook users generates more profits for those musicians. However, usually the role of Iranian Facebook users as citizen journalists is more political than commercial. This point will be discussed in detail in future chapters.

- While professional page administrators in New Zealand usually are trained to produce content as well as directing the users and participating in discussions on the page, Iranian administrators usually do not use special techniques to convince the page followers to participate. The examples of this point could be seen in Figure 25, and how a page manager in New Zealand presents a question and increases the engagement on their page by using these techniques is very common among trained page managers, while Iranian page managers usually do not try to increase the engagement on a page.

- In terms of distributing media content on Facebook, according to the analysis of the questionnaires, Iranian Facebook users receive fewer messages from page managers compared with New Zealand Facebook users and also Iranian users are less likely to respond to the received messages in the forms of liking, sharing or commenting on posts.

6 Is Facebook a Public Sphere in Iran and New Zealand?

This chapter is about how Facebook is used as a public sphere in Iran and New Zealand. In Chapter 3, Figure 12 shows that to be an ideal public sphere Facebook should meet some qualitative and quantitative requirements: it should be accessible to all, and be free from different forms of powers; people should participate in the public sphere as individuals, and the main goal of the participation should be exchanging their ideas and reaching agreement. In addition to these qualities the quantity of communication in the public sphere is important also.

To compare different aspects of how Facebook functions as a public sphere in Iran and New Zealand, content analysis, interviews, observation, and surveys were applied as methods of collecting data. Using a purposeful sampling method, five public pages in each country were chosen to analyse the users' activities. Purposeful sampling is a sample selecting method by which a researcher chooses samples according to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). The procedure of choosing samples, as explained in Chapter 3, started with categorizing the 50 most popular pages, with the biggest number of members, of Facebook pages in Iran and New Zealand. Then, in each country, five popular pages were chosen. The pages chosen and analysed are shown in Table 1, Chapter 4.

The average popularity rank of chosen pages in New Zealand and Iran, respectively, was 10.4 and 11.6. The average number of members of the chosen pages in Iran was 1,400,000 while the average number of members of the chosen pages in New Zealand was 27,897, which

shows that chosen pages in Iran have, on average, five times more members than the New Zealand-sampled Facebook pages.

For this part of the study, the quantity and quality of online interactions among the page members were analysed and compared. The quantitative analysis of interactions answered the question about how much online communication and interaction Iranian and New Zealand Facebook users engage in, while the qualitative analysis answered the question about how these interactions and communications are effective in forming constructive communication, or what Habermas calls ‘ rational communication’. To explore these quantities and qualities, all users’ activities on the chosen pages were observed for two weeks. A total of 11,300 comments from Iranian and New Zealand users were coded and analysed.

According to the literature, the most common communication forms on Facebook are posting new content, sharing already produced content, liking or showing one of the available reactions on Facebook to published contents, commenting on a post, and replying to a comment (Kim and Yang, 2017; Miller & Jensen, 2007). To compare users’ engagement in the communication process on Facebook in Iran and New Zealand, all these activities were measured and compared during the two weeks of observation.

6.1.1 Number of posts

Posting new material on Facebook is one of the most common usages of Facebook. However, on public pages usually only page managers can post new material; in the pages selected for this study, only page managers were able to post new material on the pages. During the observation period, 185 new posts were published on the chosen Iranian pages, while 118 new posts were published on the chosen Facebook pages in New Zealand. On average, Iranian

pages had posted 13.21 posts per day, while New Zealanders had posted 8.42 posts, indicating that Iranian page managers had published more new posts than their New Zealand peers.

6.1.2 Number of likes or other reactions

During the observation period, Iranian users liked Facebook posts (or showed the other possible Facebook reactions to the posted materials) 34,264 times, while New Zealanders liked posts 12,647 times. This means that on average Iranians had 1,852 likes per post, while New Zealanders had 1,039 likes per post. Although it seems that Iranian Facebook users liked posts around three times more than New Zealanders, the results changed when the average number of page members in each country was considered. On average, the number of likes or reactions per person was 319 for Iranian pages, and 1,039 for New Zealand pages, indicating that New Zealand Facebook users had engaged in liking, or showing their feelings about a post, by any possible form of Facebook reaction, three times more than Iranians.

6.1.3 Number of comments

Commenting on a post helps Facebook users to express their feelings and ideas directly through their own words and could be considered one of the clearest ways of responding to posts and expressing people's ideas publicly (De Vries et al., 2012). This is especially important for public pages, where the users can't express their ideas by posting new content. Reviewing the number of comments on posts demonstrated that while Iranian Facebook users had put 22,450 comments on the posts, New Zealanders had commented 26,884 times on posts, indicating an average of 122 comments per post for Iranians, and 228 for New Zealanders, that is two times more than Iranians. Clearly, even without considering the effect of the average number of the pages' members, New Zealanders were more interested in commenting on the posts than Iranians. Calculating the effect of the number of the page's members increased this difference dramatically; while on average Iranians had made 25

comments per post, each post on the pages chosen from New Zealand received 225 comments on average. Thus, the results show a noticeable difference in this type of online engagement between New Zealand and Iranian Facebook users.

6.1.4 Number of shares

Sharing information is one of the most common reasons attracting people to Facebook, and users share content because they usually want to engage and inform more people (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Counting the number of shared posts on the chosen pages during the observation showed that Iranians shared posted content 33,869 times, and New Zealanders 12,047 times. That is, on average, while Iranian Facebook users shared a post 183 times, New Zealand users shared the posted contents 102 times. However, taking the page population into account, on average, Iranian Facebook users shared posts 32 times, while the New Zealanders shared 102 times, indicating that New Zealand Facebook users were three times more interested in sharing the interesting posts than their Iranian peers.

6.1.5 Number of replies to comments

Replying to comments on a post is another important form of engagement in online communication on Facebook, through which users engage in direct conversation with each other (Lee et al., 2013). The number of replies to comments was 3,603 times by Iranians compared to 9,010 times by New Zealanders, indicating an average of 19 and 76 replies to comments on a post by Iranians and New Zealanders, respectively. Considering the effect of the average number of page members shows that on average Iranian Facebook users had replied three times to post comments, while New Zealand Facebook users had replied 76 times, which is 25 times more than Iranians. This shows a big difference between Iranian and New Zealand Facebook users in their likelihood of communicating with each other directly.

6.1.6 Summary

The table below shows the average of activities per post on the chosen Facebook pages in Iran and New Zealand after considering the average number of page members.

Table 7: The reaction of Iranian and New Zealand respondents to the posts on Facebook pages taking the number of page members into account

	Iran	New Zealand
Likes per post	319	1039
Comments per post	25	228
Shares per post	32	102
Replies per post	3	76

The measured numbers reflect the quantity of engagement in online communication among Iranian and New Zealand Facebook users. As the numbers show, online interaction and communication happen much less among Iranian Facebook users than among New Zealanders. The numbers show that active engagement in using Facebook is more common among New Zealand Facebook users than Iranians, and the difference between Iran and New Zealand becomes particularly apparent in commenting on posts or replying to other users' comments. The particular feature of commenting is that users use their own words and write their idea actively, in comparison to liking, which is a passive online activity (Tosun, 2012). Iranian Facebook users engage in this form of communication much less than New Zealanders, which could be related to their social and political differences, which will be discussed in future sections.

6.2 The influence of economic and politic conditions on the differences between Iran and New Zealand in online communication

One of the main ways that the economy and politics influence the quantity of online communication on Facebook is how this platform is accessible to the users in Iran and New

Zealand. Accessibility is one of the important features a public sphere should have. The main influence of the economy on using Facebook is related to whether or not people are able to buy access to the Internet. There are significant differences in access to high-speed internet between Iran and New Zealand, as shown in Figure 26. Iran has one of the most expensive Internet connections in the world (McCarthy, 2017).

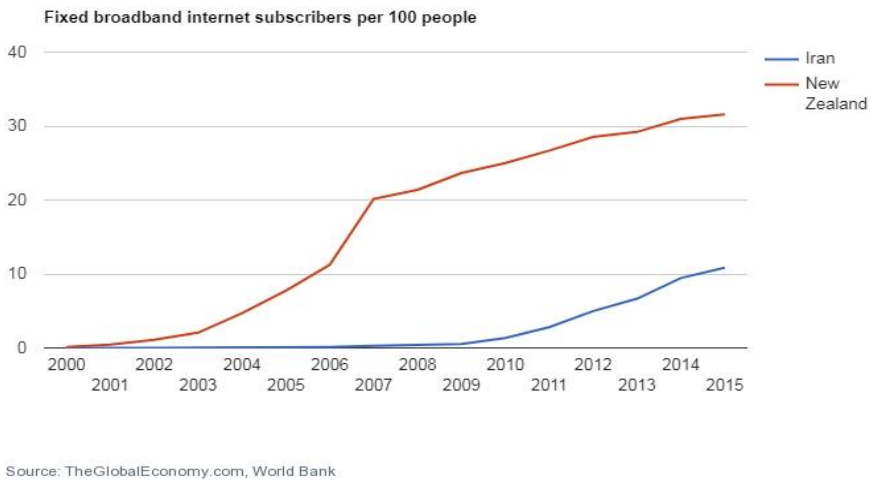


Figure 26: The comparison between broadband subscribers in Iran and New Zealand

Although the effect of the economy on the online communication style is not mentioned clearly in the interviews, some quotes in the interviews indicate the ease of using the Internet in New Zealand. For example, this quote is about the ease of online trading in New Zealand, and also alludes to the strength of New Zealand's internet infrastructure:

> You know, I suppose there's always difficulties dealing with people face to face… you know, once you have to email someone and get them to come back to you, I suppose there's difficulties there. But … I suppose what makes it easier is that all the resources are right there in one place. Then the whole kind of architecture, the infrastructure of listing what you want … (NZ5).

Unlike New Zealanders, Iranian interviewees have clearly pointed out the importance of the economic factors in using Facebook. For example, this interviewee argued:

> Well, actually in Iran … well, there wasn't any point for me to use Facebook. It was a page having so many pictures. So, it consumes my Internet and well …for me, it was the question that what do I want to get from it? (IR4)

As evident in this quote, Iranian Facebook users sometimes consider the price of the Internet before deciding how to use the Internet. In addition to the high price of the Internet in Iran, using an anti-filter to access Facebook reduces the Internet speed noticeably, consequently the users may become discouraged from engaging in online discussion, which usually requires more time spent on one page. In addition to the price, the speed of the Internet also affects how people use it (Luambano & Nawe, 2004). According to the website *speedtest.net*, in December 2019 the speed of internet in Iran for mobile internet was ranked at 70th and for fixed broadband internet it was 134th in the world, while for New Zealand these numbers were 14th and 24th respectively. The bigger numbers indicate a slower internet. In Iran the speed of the Internet usually has been kept low by the government and for many years the maximum speed of internet connections for homes was limited (http://ayaronline.ir/, 2015).

Furthermore, the graph below shows the coverage of the broadband internet in Iran and New Zealand and it shows that in the period of 2012-2014 the coverage of the broadband internet in New Zealand was expanding much faster in New Zealand than in Iran.

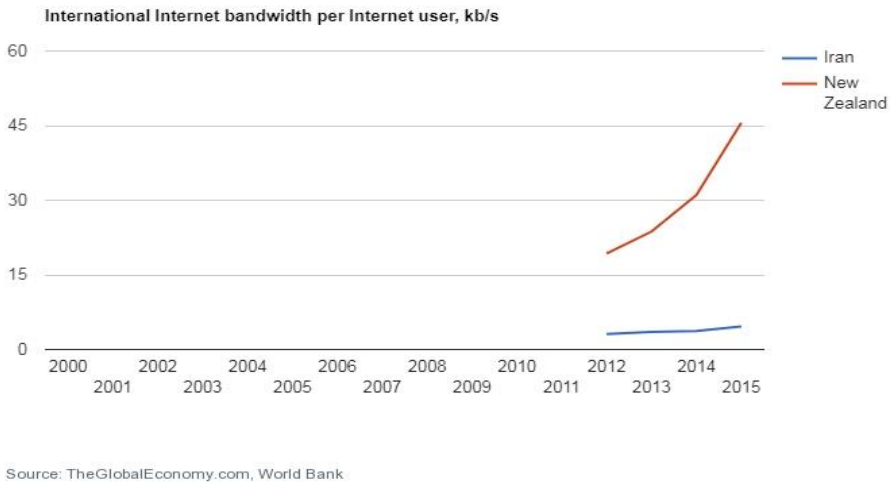


Figure 27: The Comparison of the International Internet bandwidth per Internet user in Iran and New Zealand

6.2.1 How different social factors affect discussions on Facebook in Iran and New Zealand

In both Iran and New Zealand, interviewees mentioned different factors that stop them from participating in online communication. For example, one New Zealand interviewee mentioned two reasons for avoiding participation in discussions on Facebook: first, they think their knowledge and expertise about the topic is inadequate. Secondly, they do not want their friends, or social network to see they are arguing with strangers online. The interviewee explains these points as:

> …There's always too many factors to distil down to a single Facebook comment and I definitely would feel like I do not actually know enough to contribute … I would definitely be able to join the crowds of people saying, oh, you're wrong, and I'm right. But I feel I do not know enough. I'm not an expert to make a very solid comment on a topic. And also, I do not want my friends see my arguments with strangers on Facebook, I have no desire to be in arguments with strangers really. There is nothing good to come out of it (NZ2).

Other reasons that New Zealand Facebook users mentioned are that it is a waste of time. For example, one interviewee said:

> …I try not to get involved in conversations. Because firstly, it's quite often a waste of time, like in the case of commenting on a new conservatives' Facebook page, you're not going to achieve anything, these people are already [so you know] head strong in their views that all you're going to do is get in a fight. It's like, you know, end up writing paragraphs and paragraphs and think, what am I doing […] wasting my time doing this. [There's] other stuff I should be doing while I've been arguing with strangers over Facebook. …. People are very argumentative over Facebook. And I think when it's Facebook and not face-to-face, it gets personal very quickly. Yeah, insults thrown around, because you're hiding behind a screen (NZ2).

In general, the New Zealand interviewees say that hiding behind the screen provides more freedom and encourages the users to express themselves. When I asked an interviewee if there is something that worries or stops them from expressing their ideas on Facebook, they answered like this:

> I would say it's almost the opposite. From what I've seen, … I feel like people are more likely to express how they really feel because they're protected, […] it's just on a screen [and they are] sitting behind a keyboard. You know, it's not real life so nothing bad is going to happen to them, other than, I guess, someone attacking them verbally on that post (NZ1).

In case of attacking and offending the others the interviewee NZ2 said:

> About a week ago, for example, a post came up in my feed, which was a sponsored post by the new conservatives' page, which is the political party, and I didn't like the

> page, […] and this party is completely against everything that I stand for, like politically and socially. So, I commented on it. It was obviously a bad idea, because people who have liked the Facebook page jumped [to argue] and I have ended up on Facebook, which I try to avoid, you know, yeah. But like when stuff's coming up in your Facebook feed from pages you haven't even liked that's kind of spouting views that are quite contradictory towards your own (NZ2).

To summarise, New Zealanders who avoid participating in online discussions usually are concerned about factors like being offended by the other participants, being seen by other friends, or the dysfunctionality of online discussions, as well as the inadequacy of their knowledge and experience of the issue. In general, analysing New Zealand interviewees' answers finds that they are mainly concerned about what could be categorised as 'social and personal factors.' However, Iranian interviewees had different concerns. When I asked a similar question of an Iranian interviewee about their concerns about participating in online discussions, they answered:

> I think you always have this fear, especially like in countries like Iran. You always think that [...] I might be under surveillance or something. So I may not be that honest in that discussion. But for me myself, if I have that kind of feeling, I do not even go into that discussion, then I do not have to go there and then stop myself from saying (IR5).

Another Iranian Interviewee explained this issue like this:

> … Because Iran is like half-half, just the same as other countries, some people some like the government some people do not. Yeah, and, the policy that Iranian government has taken is just not letting people share their ideas (IR4).

In addition to being worried about the government surveillance, wasting time online seems a concern for some Iranians as well as New Zealanders. Another person explains their experience like this:

[It] happened to me to reading people's comments, reading [the comments] is just a waste of time. Because, in Iran, most of our online comments and personal opinions are not based on a theory or information that you can trust. It is just a personal opinion, coming out of a very shallow thought. … It takes so much time if you read all of these comments to get to one notable quote or something which [is] worth [spending] your time. So, I think it's not worth it to spend that much time (IR4).

Analysing the interviews with Iranians finds they are concerned not only, similar to New Zealanders, about 'social factors' but also what could be called 'state punishments.' However, Iranian interviewees did not mention the lack of information, which was mentioned by New Zealanders as a factor that stops them from participating in Facebook discussions, as being a hindering factor for them.

6.2.2 Online participation according to the survey results

In addition to the interviews, the survey shows some similarities and differences between New Zealand and Iranian Facebook users. Tables 8 and 9 respectively show how Iranian and New Zealand respondents react to a political post that they receive:

1=always, 5=never

Table 8: The reaction of the Iranian respondents to the political posts

#	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Count
1	Liking the post	3.69	1.39	36
2	Commenting on the post	4.56	0.93	36
3	Re-posting (sharing) the post	4.71	0.51	35
4	Replying to a comment on a post	4.40	0.76	35

Table 9: The reaction of New Zealand respondents to the political posts

#	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Count
1	Liking the post	3.11	0.93	27
2	Commenting on the post	3.63	0.96	27
3	Re-posting (sharing) the post	4.04	0.83	28
4	Replying to a comment on a post	4.12	0.89	26

These tables show that although both Iranian and New Zealand respondents do not engage with political posts, Iranian users are still slightly more active than New Zealanders about political posts.

The table below shows how New Zealand respondents react to a commercial post:

1 = always, 5 = never

Table 10: The reaction of the New Zealand respondents to the commercial posts

#	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Count
1	Liking the post	4.12	1.02	34
2	Commenting on the post	4.71	0.46	34
3	Re-posting (sharing) the post	4.63	0.96	35
4	Replying to a comment on a post	4.23	1.02	35

The table below depicts the responses from Iranians to the same questions:

Table 11: The reaction of Iranian respondents to the commercial posts

#	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Count
1	Liking the post	4.42	0.77	19
2	Commenting on the post	4.58	0.77	19
3	Re-posting (sharing) the post	4.57	0.75	21
4	Replying to a comment on a post	4.61	0.74	21

These two tables show that Iranians and New Zealanders both have low engagement with commercial posts on Facebook, however New Zealanders have a higher standard deviation, which means their answers are more scattered than Iranians' and some of them do engage with commercial posts. The survey respondents were asked about other people who engage in online discussions on Facebook and whether those people have enough knowledge about the discussed topic, or if in online discussions people genuinely try to reach agreement, and were also asked about the power of logic in online discussions on Facebook. The answers collected from the survey were in line with what interviewees had expressed and explained. The table below represents the answers of New Zealand respondents to these questions:

Table 12: New Zealand respondents' answers to questions about people who participate in online discussions

	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Count
1	Participants in Facebook discussions have enough knowledge of the discussed topic	4.15	0.88	34
2	Participants in Facebook discussions feel free of any pressure to express their ideas on Facebook	3.30	1.36	33
3	Participants in Facebook discussions genuinely try to reach an agreement in their discussions	4.06	1.04	33
4	In Facebook discussion it is only the power of logic and reasoning that defines the winner of the discussion	3.91	1.27	34

The table below shows the responses from Iranians to the same questions:

Table 13: Iranian respondents' answers to the questions about people who participate in online discussions

	Field	Mean	Std Deviation	Count
1	Participants in Facebook discussions have enough knowledge of the discussed topic	4.103	0.772	29
2	Participants in Facebook discussions feel free of any pressure to express their ideas on Facebook	4.3	0.87	31
3	Participants in Facebook discussions genuinely try to reach an agreement in their discussions	4.36	0.67	31
4	In Facebook discussion it is only the power of logic and reasoning that defines the winner of the discussion	3.9	1.07	30

It appears from these responses that both Iran and New Zealand Facebook users usually are not very interested in online communication, however New Zealand respondents show a slightly higher interest than Iranians. According to the interviews, the reasons behind this lack of interest in online discussions differ between Iranian and New Zealand respondents. For New Zealand respondents, personal and social factors such as lack of knowledge, or being concerned about their social network's reaction, play the more important role in stopping them from participation in discussions on Facebook. For Iranians, economic and political reasons, such as the availability of the Internet, play a stronger role as hindering factors. However, some personal factors, which were mentioned by New Zealand respondents, are also identifiable among Iranians.

6.3 The quality of online communication

In the previous section, the quantity of the engagement in online communication on Facebook among Iranians and New Zealanders was compared. However, most of the noted prerequisites of the public sphere, described by Habermas and other scholars (as shown in Chapter 3), refer to the quality of communication in a public sphere. Reviewing the literature highlighted four qualitative factors as the prerequisites of a public sphere, as was shown in Figure 12: being accessible to all; being free from any type of power that helps someone to impose their ideas on others; participating as individuals separated from their social positions; and exchanging ideas. In the rest of this section, the quality of online communication will be analysed and compared among Facebook users in Iran and New Zealand.

All the 11,300 comments on posts on the selected pages during the observation period were coded according to four codes, depending on: whether they are acceptable, which means they are understandable to other users; whether they are related to the topic of the post; the comments contain writing or are only emoticons; the comments are not understandable, for

example a row of meaningless keyboard signs, or they insult other users, which shuts down the conversation or the process of exchanging ideas. The results of coding and analysing comments found a difference between the quality of online communication in Iran and New Zealand.

6.3.1 Acceptable comments

The acceptable comments refer to comments that add any type of idea or information to the conversation and are understandable to most of the page members who can see the comments. If other users do not understand a comment the communication process does not progress, and a public communication does not form. For example, if on an Iranian page a user writes a comment in Chinese language, it is not acceptable because most of the page members do not understand it, so the Chinese comment does not add any ideas or information to the discussion. Acceptable comments usually appear in the form of presenting a new idea and supporting or declining an already presented idea. In the analysed sample, the acceptable comments were 94.1% for Iranian users compared to 98.4% for the New Zealand users.

6.3.2 Relevance to the topic

This code refers to the relationship between the comments and the topic, which means the comment should be related to the post or the discussion topic, otherwise it does not help to develop the discussion. For example, if a topic is about using drugs and suddenly a user makes a comment asking another user to go shopping, it is coded as unrelated because it is not related to the discussion topic, in addition to ignoring most of the other participants in the discussion. The results show that 3.6% of the acceptable comments published by Iranians were not related to the topic, while in New Zealand 0.7% of the comments were unrelated to the topic.

6.3.3 Content (just emoticons)

Using emoticons is a form of communication that simply reflects users' feelings and emotions towards a topic. For some reasons many Facebook users prefer using emoticons to show their feeling rather than verbalizing it. Results show that the comments of Iranian users that were just emoticons were 19% compared to 11% for the New Zealand users. This shows that Iranian users had a significantly greater tendency to show their feelings through emoticons compared to New Zealanders.

6.3.4 Abnormal/insulting communication

Habermas asserted that following norms is a condition of communication in a public sphere. Several other scholars, such as Frazer and postmodern scholars, insist that there are discourses and norms that dominate a public sphere, however they argue that each public sphere might have a different dominant discourse and set of norms (Squires, 2002). Thus, the domination of a particular set of norms should exist in a public sphere to guide the conversation. To code comments as abnormal/insulting, it is important to know that some words may be considered inappropriate according to the dominant culture in a country but considered acceptable in some subcultures. Thus, since words/terms by themselves may not provide enough information for this coding, the research considered additional factors to identify the insulting or abnormal comments, including the intonation of the writer, the reaction of the person who received the comment, the cultural situation of the participants, and if they accepted or rejected the comment. Clearly, being familiar with the cultures of both Iran and New Zealand was crucial for this part of the coding. The results found that 19% of acceptably written comments by Iranian users were insulting or abnormal towards the other party to the communication, compared to 0.2 % in New Zealand, a figure that is 95 times less than Iran. The offensive arguments and insults have been mentioned as a hindering factor for online

discussions by Iranian and New Zealand interviewees. However, analysis of the written comments finds in this case there is a remarkable difference between these two countries.

6.3.5 Total engagement according to the quality of comments

Considering all four codes, and removing unacceptable, non-relevant, and insulting/abnormal comments from the total number of comments, the research found that in Iran 71.5% of the comments met the basic requirements of being considered a communicative action in a public sphere, compared to 97.5% in New Zealand.

6.3.6 Some other factors which might influence the quantity and quality of online communication on Facebook in Iran and New Zealand

There are some socio-cultural differences between Iran and New Zealand, which might explain the observed differences between these two countries in terms of how Facebook functions as a public sphere.

6.3.6.1 Individualism

According to Kim and Sherman (2007), self-expression is a basic value in individualism and is promoted in individualist cultures. Therefore, it is expected that individualism has an influence on self-expression. According to the website *Hofstede-insights.com*, which measures and compares different cultural indexes for different countries based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 2009), Iran has a score of 41 on the index of individualism and is considered a collective society, while New Zealand's score of 79 indicates a more individualist country (hofstede-insights.com, 2018). The comparison of the indexes of individualism in Iran and New Zealand was presented in Chapter 1, Figure 2.

This suggests that New Zealanders consider themselves as independent people, while Iranians see themselves as members of a group, which could be an interest or political group, and as long as one of the group members presents the groups' ideas the other users do not feel they

are required to present their personal ideas. As clearly shown in the observation, Facebook discussions among Iranian Facebook users were usually arguments among different interest groups, while in New Zealand the discussions usually occurred between individual Facebook users. In some cases, such as shown in Figure 28, the effect of nationality or ethnicity on the quality of discussions could be observed. These types of conversations among Iranians appear to regularly became harsh and to devolve from a logical discussion to fighting and swearing. The photo below is an example of Iranian Facebook users treating everybody in a discussion as a member of a group. The shared post on Facebook is a piece of news about a Chinese tourist, and Iranian Facebook users' comments could be considered as judging other nationalities like Chinese, Danish, Afghan and even Iranian people, and the Facebook users who participate in this conversation never talk about the person who the news is about.

Figure 28: Public sphere example

Some of the first comments are summarised here, however this style of conversation could be seen all through the comments:

The news title: *Police in China are looking for a man who took a dolphin with him*.

> *First comment*: Damn Danish, according to an old tradition, every year they slaughter hundreds of dolphins with knife, axe, and cleaver….
>
> *Second comment*: Bad tradition, In Iran for two months in a year people mourn; they say this is a tradition. 10 days they mourn and beat themselves to die, they stop traffic because they block streets…
>
> *Third comment*: Chinese do not have mercy at all; they are taking over the Persian Gulf, (which is for Iranians). These dolphins are for themselves (in their own seas).

As shown, users prefer to judge other nationalities or groups rather than talking about the news topic or the individual the news is about. These types of comments, which usually judge other nationalities or groups of people, and might be considered racist comments, were frequently found in an analysis of Iranian Facebook public pages.

6.3.6.2 The power distance

According to Habermas (1994) having equal rights for participants is the basis of any democracy and a public sphere (Habermas, 1994). The index of power distance, as was shown in Figure 29, indicates the comparative equality of people's expression of their ideas in Iran and New Zealand. The index of power distance is one of the six cultural indexes that Geert Hofstede developed to measure the effect of cultures on organizational behaviours. According to Hofstede (2011), 'Power distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally' (Hofstede, 2011).

This index shows that Iran has a much greater power distance, and Iranians are not usually free to express their ideas publicly. This means in real life in Iran people are not encouraged to

express their views on different issues, and even when they have the opportunity on Facebook to express themselves online, social and cultural norms stop them from expressing their ideas, while New Zealanders have the right to reveal their ideas and practise this in real life, which is asserted in the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act (1990).

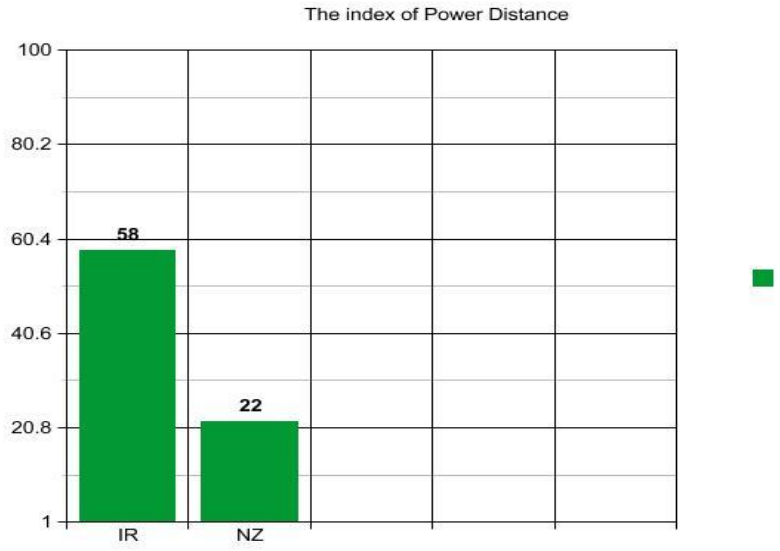


Figure 29: The comparison of the indexes of power distance in Iran and New Zealand (hofstede-insights.com, 2018)

6.3.6.3 Voice and accountability

The World Bank defines the Index of Voice and Accountability as capturing 'perceptions of the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media' (datacatalog.worldbank.org, 2020).

The Index of Voice and Accountability is part of the Worldwide Governance Indicators developed by Daniel Kaufman, Art Kray, and Massimo Mastruzzi (Langbein & Knack, 2010). Ferree et al. (2002) argue that if people feel they have more effect on decisions in their country they are more encouraged to participate in a public sphere. Looking at this index shows that there is a remarkable difference between Iranians and New Zealanders. The

comparison between the Voice of Accountability Index of Iran and New Zealand indicates that while New Zealanders are able to be very effective in making political decisions, Iranian citizens do not have much power to affect political decisions. This may indicate that New Zealanders see their personal opinions as more effective, and this situation encourages them to express their personal ideas, while Iranians do not find it very effective to share their ideas in public.

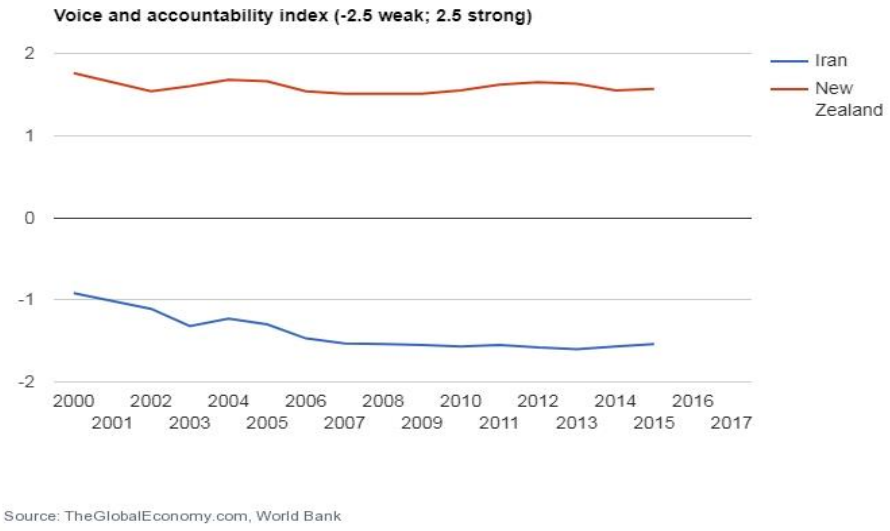


Figure 30: The comparison of Voice and Accountability Indexes of Iran and New Zealand

6.3.6.4 Press freedom and the Internet regulations in Iran

Reviewing the press freedom rankings in both Iran and New Zealand, as shown in Figure 31, demonstrates a dramatic difference between these two countries. In addition to the low level of press freedom, Iran has been categorised as an internet enemy while NZ is considered as a free country in terms of access to the Internet. Freedom of expression has a direct effect on the quality of the public sphere, and, in fact, it is the basis of any public sphere (Christensen, 2010). One of the most mentioned features of the Internet for discussion and other civic participation is anonymity (Bohman, 2004; Papacharissi, 2004; Douai & Nofal, 2012). But the history of online social activism in Iran shows that Iranians cannot rely on online anonymity

because many online activists have been traced and arrested by the government. Because of that, as mentioned in the interviews, many Iranian internet users have the feeling that their online activities are potentially under the government's scrutiny.

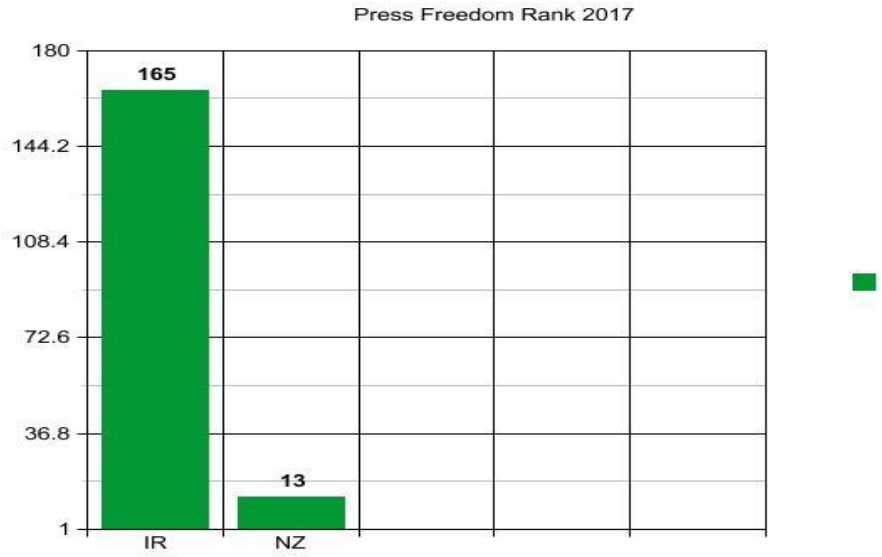


Figure 31: Comparison of the press freedom rankings of Iran and New Zealand (https://rsf.org/en/, 2018).

6.3.6.5 Social anger

Some experts argue that the extreme social anger in Iran is partly the result of the economic situation in the country (irna.ir, 2020). In 2017, Gallup reported Iranians to be the angriest people in the world (Khabaronline, 2017), while New Zealand is usually ranked among the happiest countries in the world (CNBC, 2018). Anger could be seen easily in online conversations in an analysis of Iranian Facebook users. Usually, after a few comments and replies, Iranian Facebook users became angry and swore at each other instead of reasoning about their point. In the examples from New Zealand, by contrast, it is easy to find comments with many participants and comments in which people try to defend their ideas logically, with more than 50 replies to a comment. In Iran, it is difficult to find a comment with more than five replies in which participants do not become angry and abusive. The example below illustrates the differences between the style of discussing a topic, such as racism, among Iranian and New Zealand Facebook users. In the examples shown from a Facebook page in

Iran people become very defensive and angry and insulted other nationalities and races, which is very different from the quality of the communication on the New Zealand Facebook page:

Figure 32: Public sphere example

The title of the news item shared by the BBC is: *What do Afghan elites think about Iran*? In this example after one positive (or friendly) comment (the first) in which the person said that Afghans usually support Iran, although even this comment has anti-Arab content indications, the discussion changes to a fight between Iranians and Afghans and it is not easy to find any type of reasoning in this discussion. This type of angry discussion occurs frequently in the observed pages. This is in line with the study by Faris et al. (2016) mentioned in Chapter 2, about the conversations in Arab countries such as Tunisia and Egypt that showed antagonism and divided public spheres.

The example below, Figure 33, is an example of a discussion among New Zealand Facebook users about racism, which shows a clear difference from the style of discussion around this topic among Iranian Facebook users. As shown in the photo below, the first comment is: 'I actually give it a go but I'd like to see Maori reciprocate and stop saying 'youse' which always gets up my nose. And putting k's in things and using of instead of have.' The second comment, which is a reply to this comment, is: 'you do realise that a lot of people say 'yous', as in the plural of you, and k and like? It's not just Māori.' The next reply to the comment is: 'I get annoyed when people say arks instead of asks. To me they always sound dopey does not matter what colour they are.' The rest of comments are also remaining somewhat peaceful without harsh attacks on each other. This style of moderate communication could be observed in the majority of communication. However, to understand the interviewees' concerns about being attacked in online discussion, the tolerance of each society defines the harshness of the insults and attacks to those people. It means words that might not feel very harsh to Iranians may be considered big insults and attacks in New Zealand or vice versa.

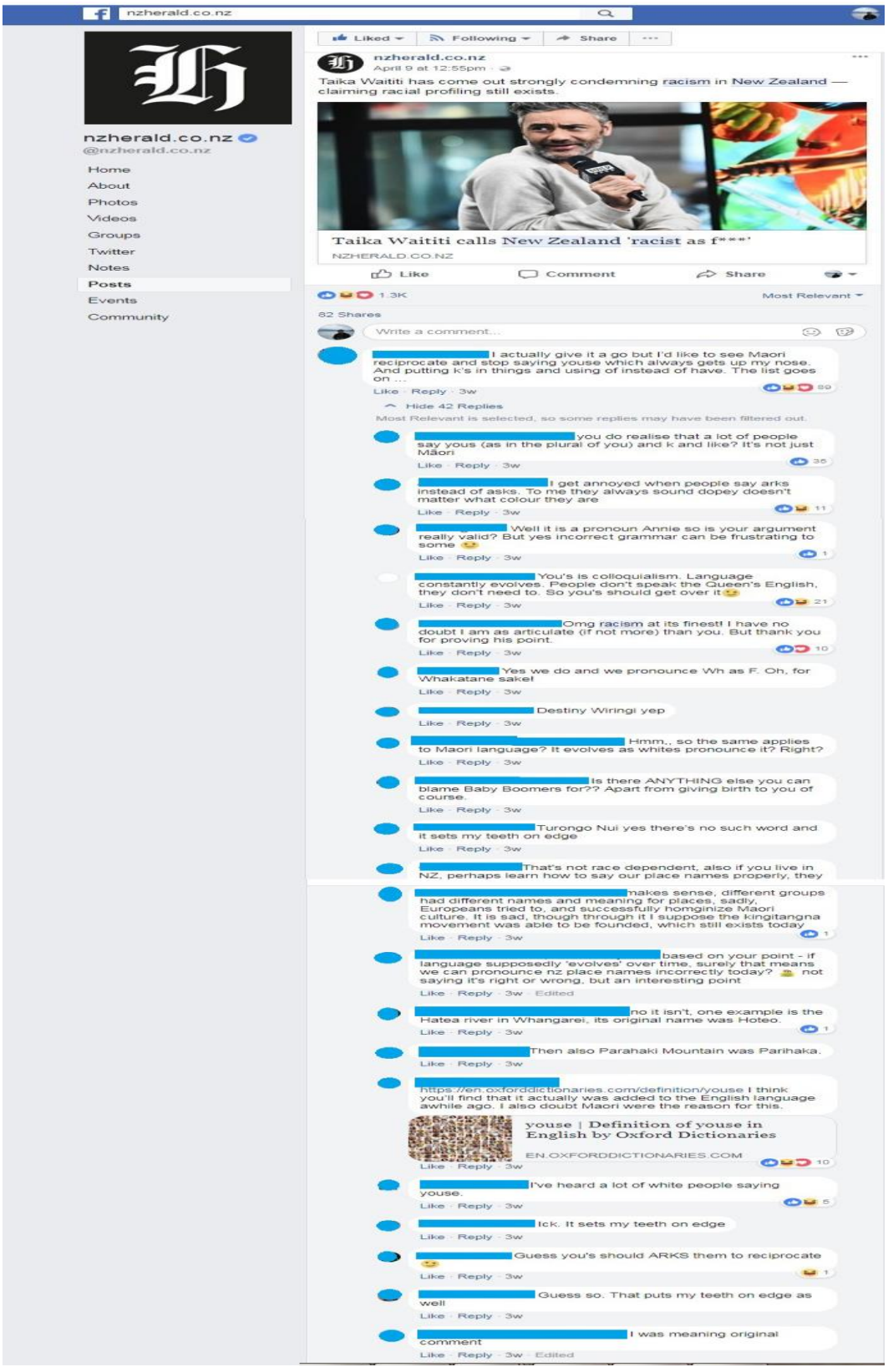


Figure 33: Public sphere example

6.4 Summary

The qualitative and quantitative analyses of the online conversations of the Facebook users in Iran and New Zealand finds some similarities and apparent differences between these two countries. Primarily New Zealand Facebook users notably participate in online communication more than Iranian users. However, users in both countries do not show much interest in online discussion. The results showed that on the selected public pages, on average, Iranian Facebook users made 25 comments on a post, compared to 228 by New Zealand users, indicating that New Zealanders engage in commenting activity as a form of communication 9.12 times more than Iranians. The qualitative analysis of the comments found that only 71.5% of comments by the Iranian Facebook users meet the quality requirements to be part of constructive communication, while for New Zealand users this was 97.5%. By considering the quality of the comments, it is clear that Iranian Facebook users put 71.5% * 25=17.9 constructive comments per post while New Zealander users put 97.5% * 228= 222.3; showing that New Zealand Facebook users participated in constructive communication 12.4 (222.3/17.9=12.4) times more than Iranian users. Another part of the analysis involved comparison between the replies to comments, as an important method of direct conversation with another user. On average, Iranian Facebook users replied to comments 1.479 times per post, compared to 66.218 times for New Zealand users, indicating that New Zealanders were 44.77 times more active than Iranian Facebook users in replying to comments and engaging in direct conversation with other members of a page.

In these differences in participation, apart from the highlighted role of politics and the economy – such as the government scrutiny and fear of punishment by the government, or the price of the Internet – which stops Iranians from expressing their opinion and was asserted by interviewees, some other social factors have been suggested which could be taken into consideration as influential factors. The level of individualism, the power distance, voice of

accountability, press freedom, and social anger have been discussed in the context of Facebook engagement in this chapter. Some of these factors are directly related to the political systems in both countries. The analysis of the comments indicates that even if Facebook is a potential public sphere in Iran and New Zealand, sometimes it does not behave like a Habermasian public sphere and often shows antagonistic discussions. However, the analysis showed an underlined difference between Iran and New Zealand in terms of antagonistic online discussions. This antagonism often discourages potential participants from discussions.

7 Facebook as a battlefield of alternative discourses in Iran and New Zealand

7.1 Analysing the elements of the process of using Facebook in Iran and New Zealand

As discussed in Chapter 3, Foucault argues that a discourse comprises the two main elements of power and knowledge, which support and reproduce each other. This thesis considers Facebook use as a process that includes elements that make Facebook available for using in a country, and the elements that use it. Therefore,to apply a Foucauldian discourse analysis to how Facebook is used in a society it is necessary to study the role of these elements of the process of Facebook use in the cycle of producing power-knowledge in Facebook. In general, there are three elements that structure Facebook use: First, Facebook the company, which owns and regulates the platform and interface; secondly, the governments of the countries where Facebook is being used, which provide or regulate internet infrastructure and make policy that affects the internet and Facebook within the country; and thirdly, Facebook users. Facebook users can be divided into two subgroups: corporations, organizations or celebrities (COCs), which use Facebook and other social media platforms for their strategic purposes; and regular individual users, who use Facebook for their daily activity. While both use Facebook, COCs and regular users have different opportunities to be visible on Facebook and share their ideas. COCs, because of their financial resources, usually have more opportunities than regular users to be visible on Facebook through employing others to be active on Facebook on their behalf, or spending money to buy more visibility on Facebook.

This chapter uses Foucauldian discourse analysis to analyse the influence of the elements discussed above and how they relate to people's use of Facebook. There are different ways of

applying discourse analysis to answer different questions. This method of analysis addresses the main question of whether or not a text supports the hegemony of the dominant discourse which created that particular socio-cultural condition (Hjelm, 2014). The current study uses a discourse analysis of social practices based on Foucault's theorisation of the relationship between knowledge and power. First, the chapter identifies the share of knowledge and power for each one of the elements of the discourse, and how their power or knowledge influences how people use Facebook in Iran and New Zealand.

7.2 Power and knowledge among the elements of using the Facebook process in a country

According to Noyes (2015) Facebook users are the main source of Facebook content, therefore, they are the main source of knowledge that is produced and shared. Although different types and categorizations of knowledge are described by many scholars (Antal, 2000; De Jong & Ferguson-Hessler, 1996), the main types of knowledge on Facebook are communicated in content that can be embedded on the platform, such as video, audio, picture, text, or a combination of these formats (Chun et al., 2010). As described in Chapter 3, power can have different forms and the diagram below shows the type of power that each element of Facebook use has. For example, since sharing knowledge of Facebook needs to be in the form of content and Facebook's regular users are the main producers of content on Facebook, it could be said that individual Facebook users have the greatest ability to produce and share knowledge on Facebook, however, they have the least amount of power of all the elements.

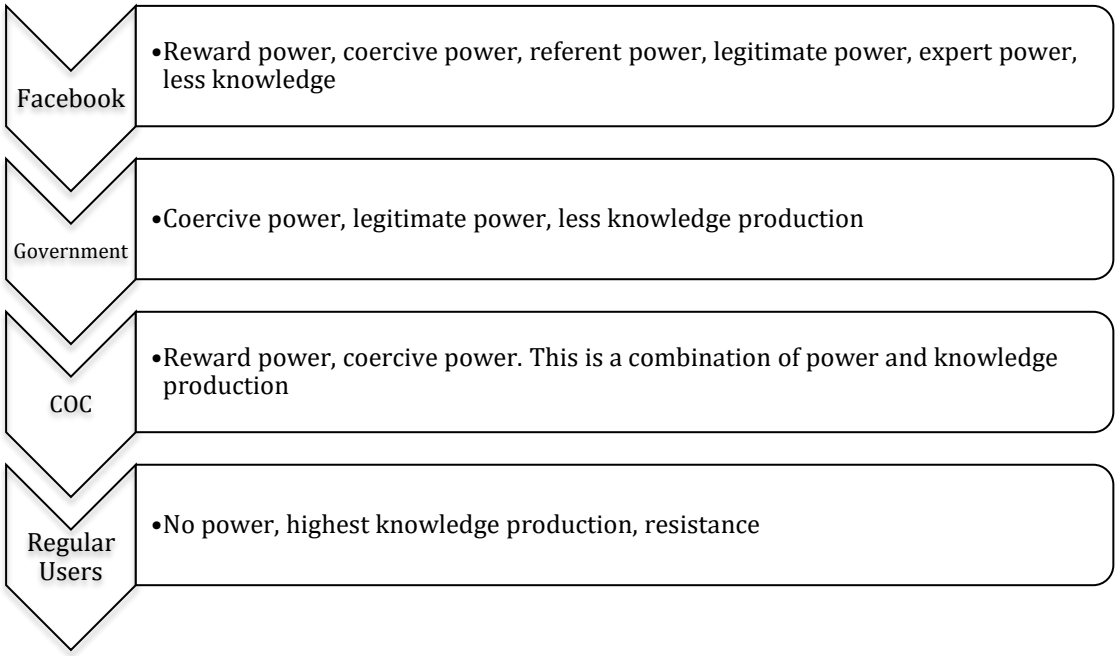


Figure 34: The hierarchy of power among the elements of using Facebook process in a country

Each part of the diagram is explained below:

7.2.1 Facebook's company as the owner of the platform

The Facebook company as the owner of the Facebook platform has all forms of powers: reward, coercive, referent, legitimate, and expert power. Its reward power is related to how the Facebook company can make some content more visible than other content. Its coercive power refers to the ability of the Facebook company to stop users from using the platform by censorship or even deleting accounts, which could be considered a form of punishment. In addition, the Facebook company has a referent power because it has designed the platform and can decide what activities are possible or encouraged on it. Furthermore, the Facebook company has legitimate power, because all users who create a Facebook account must agree with Facebook's terms and conditions, which gives authority to the Facebook company. Moreover, the expert power of Facebook refers to the knowledge and skills of the experts who design and manage the website. In terms of knowledge which is produced on Facebook, since the company produces and shares a very limited amount of content on it, which is usually

about using the Facebook platform, it is not considered to be a predominant owner or producer of knowledge in the power-knowledge circle.

7.2.2 Government

Following the Facebook company, the government is the next most powerful element in the Facebook use cycle. The government has legitimate power as well as coercive power. The legitimate power of a government originates from its ability to regulate Internet and Facebook use. In addition, governments can use coercive power to support their decisions and, for example, punish Facebook users who do not obey the laws about using Facebook. Although some governments use Facebook to share content with Facebook users, compared to what is being shared on Facebook by all users this is likely to be a small proportion of shared content on Facebook.

7.2.3 Corporations / organizations/ celebrities (COCs)

Corporations, Organizations, and Celebrities may have some reward, expert, referent, or coercive power. However, COCs can use their power only in relation to a very small portion of other Facebook users who follow them. For example, COCs can reward some users by giving special services in exchange for what they have done for the corporation, organisation or celebrity. COCs combine content production ability with their financial resources and reward power. They can increase the visibility of their productions by paying Facebook to boost their content or they may have many followers who share their content.

7.2.4 Regular Facebook users

Regular Facebook users do not have any of the above-mentioned forms of power, nevertheless, they are significant producers, distributors, and consumers of shared knowledge on Facebook. The knowledge that Facebook users produce or consume can support the dominant discourse and power relation within their society, or oppose the dominant discourse

by developing and promoting a counter-discourse. Although regular users and individuals do not have any of the mentioned power forms , they can form collective actions to resist the dominant powers, which will be discussed in the resistance section.

7.3 The relationship between the elements of using Facebook

Figure 35 shows how the elements of Facebook use in a country interact with each other, and how knowledge or different types of power can protect the dominant discourse of the country or promote a counter-discourse.

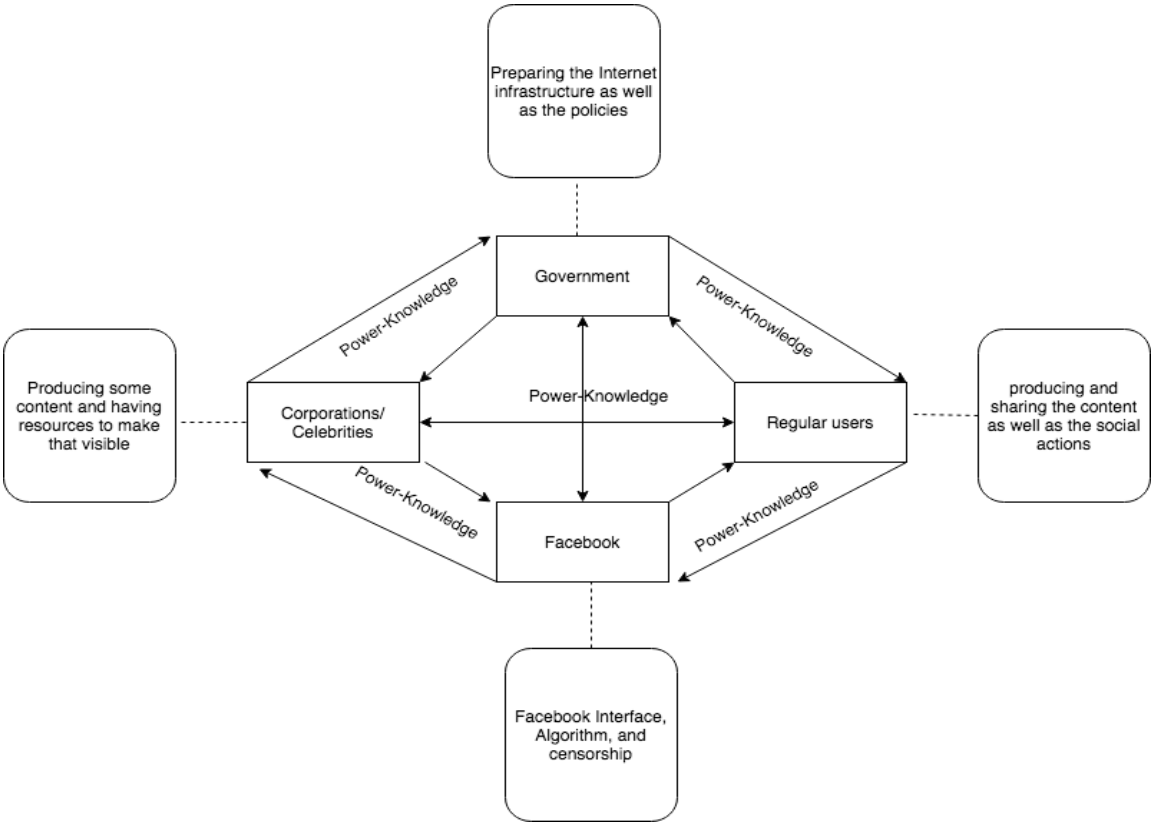


Figure 35: The relationship between the elements of using Facebook in a country

The four elements illustrated in the diagram interact with each other in six possible bilateral forms. These mutual relationships describe the power-knowledge relations in Facebook discourse, between:

- Facebook company and the government
- Facebook company and COCs
- Facebook company and regular users
- The government and COCs
- The government and regular users
- COCs and regular users

The rest of this section is devoted to the analysis of these relationships in general, and in Iran and New Zealand in particular.

7.3.1 Facebook and the Government's power relationship in Iran and New Zealand

Modern governments prefer to manage society through law (Gluckman, 2017), so the relationship between Facebook and governments in both Iran and New Zealand is regulated through each country's regulations relating to use of the media, the Internet, and social media. According to Bagdikian (2007), regulations about using Facebook are the result of government interests and the benefits of people's Facebook use. While Facebook tries to maximise its financial benefit, governments and politicians have other concerns about Facebook use. According to Blackledge (2005) Van Dijk argues that many politicians prefer to shape public opinion, instead of changing their policies according to the public's desires. Politicians play a role in reproducing ideologies that keep minority groups under domination. Politicians communicate their ideas and opinions to the public using media, and they represent their own influential opinions to society as being common sense. In fact, political forces rely more on their mutual relationship with the media than on people's opinions. In general, controlling Facebook is important for some governments for two main reasons: the potential of Facebook to be a public sphere; and the collection of data, which are available on Facebook about citizens, in order to control the society (Nilsson & Carlsson, 2014). For example, in

some countries such as Iran the government sometimes uses the data that some users share on Facebook to understand people's political opinions. This can have some consequences for Facebook users and examples of that will be presented later in the chapter. Nevertheless, the control of Facebook is not fully in the hands of the government and politicians, and the Facebook company has a crucial role in controlling the Facebook platform. Therefore, the situation of Facebook in a country can be influenced by the relationship between the government and Facebook.

There are three possible relationships that can occur between Facebook and a government. First, where Facebook and the government have similar interests or values. For example, Facebook and the New Zealand Government on most issues have similar interests and values, and this explains why the New Zealand Government, compared to Iran and China, has a minimal intervention policy in Facebook use. Secondly, Facebook and the government have some issues but can compromise their benefits. For example, Facebook and the Chinese Government sometimes negotiate to resolve their problems. Thirdly, Facebook and the government may have opposite interests. For example, Facebook and the Iranian Government that has blocked Facebook inside the country with no negotiation to mitigate the problems. In New Zealand, the government does not have a serious problem with most the activities on Facebook. However, it has paid attention to some financial aspects of Facebook such as paying tax (tvnz.co.nz, 2016). In 2019, the New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, asked Facebook and Google, as giant internet companies, to pay their fair share of tax because of their income in New Zealand (nzherald.co.nz, 2019). And, according to *indexoncensorship.org*, several countries including Iran, China, Cuba, Bangladesh, Syria, Egypt, North Korea, Mauritania, Pakistan, and Vietnam have limited or totally blocked access to Facebook for people because of the content on the platform. Some interviewees expressed

their ideas about blocking Facebook by governments. For example, an Iranian Interviewee mentions:

> …. Because [in Iran], everything such as radio or TV is limited to the government. … I think people in everyday life are looking for something new, something full of fun, something not politicised by the government. … People feel they are bombarded by the propaganda because the government wants to brainwash the people, and because of that, it keeps the country isolated from the [rest of the] world, you know, by these banning satellite receivers, by banning these websites or by banning everything, every single medium in our country should be permitted by the government to be published like books, journals or even [a] play on stage. So, because of that people are thirsty, you know, people feel the lack of something out of the official propaganda and because of that, they are really eager to find something different (IR3).

Another Iranian interviewee argued that:

> … I think because, in social media there is no control by the government … they have no control on [*sic*] and we're talking about some totalitarian regimes. They definitely don't like the freedom of speech and they don't want any sort of news to be just spreading out and reaching to people. So that's one of the reasons that they don't want to have like that sort of platform, which is available for everyone. And everyone can go and criticise the government (IR5).

Or as a New Zealand participant said, in relation to China:

> …I guess my understanding, at least is because the government doesn't want people to be able to use any form of communication that they are able to govern the use of and so they must prefer everyone to use the channels that [the government is] able to control as

> opposed to Facebook, you know, [Facebook] isn't Chinese and [it is] encrypted, people could do whatever they want with that, how to communicate with people and I guess the government definitely doesn't want people to have the ability to question or speak up about the government in a group like that and I mean, if they're doing that on an online channel that isn't controlled by the government, then, they'd be able to organise parties or disagreement or just discuss issues or criticism of the government, and [the government] definitely wants to prevent that (NZ5).

Looking at some facts about countries that have blocked Facebook can help to underline some concerns of these governments about controlling media. For example, according to *https://rsf.org/en/* (2018), in 2017 the rank of free press in these countries was: China: 176, Iran: 165, Cuba: 173, Bangladesh: 146, North Korea: 180, Syria 177, Vietnam: 175, Egypt: 161, Pakistan: 139, Mauritania: 55. The higher the number the less press freedom – a ranking of 1 means the best conditions, and 180 reflects the worst. These ranks can indicate the governments' opinions about the freedom of speech and how these governments attempt to control media. To compare Iran and New Zealand, New Zealand has a rank of 13 in press freedom, which is 149 ranks better than Iran at 162 (https://rsf.org/en/, 2018).

Some studies show that finding news is one of the most common reasons that Iranians use Facebook (Ali & Fahmy, 2013; Mortensen, 2011). In both Iran and New Zealand Facebook pages related to the news are popular, however, in New Zealand, popular news pages such as *stuff.co.nz* or *The New Zealand Herald* are based inside the country, while in Iran popular news agencies' Facebook pages include BBC Persian, Radio Farda, or VOA, which are all based outside the country, and are considered to be against the current dominant political power inside Iran and usually called 'enemies' media' by the Iranian government.

Blocking Facebook for the government of Iran is not without problems since there is a common interest in using Facebook among Iranians, and despite filtering the website a considerable number of people still use Facebook. In addition, filtering Facebook stops the government and many of its supporters from using this media platform. However, some of the government's members and their supporters still use Facebook. According to Howard (2010), in Iran, if a politician is not active on the Internet and social media, they do not look modern enough to voters, therefore, some candidates use more than websites to be in touch with potential voters. Usually, reformist candidates use digital tools for their political campaigns to compensate for their limited access to television and newspapers, which are mostly controlled by the government. For example, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, a reformist presidential candidate in Iran, used Facebook, YouTube and Twitter even a few months after the 2009 presidential election. An important point of using these digital platforms was to enable women to be active in public political conversations.

One of the things that many Iranians are criticizing the government for is filtering social media for people and using it for their own political interests at the same time. The image below shows an example of Facebook pages that the supporters of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, use to promote him and spread their messages, even though they support the government's blocking of social media.

Figure 36: Facebook discourse - example 1

Another example is the page below, which is the only page among the most popular Facebook pages in Iran that is related to politics or politicians, and it belongs to the Iranian foreign minister.

Figure 37: Facebook discourse - example 2

The page below is named ‘Basijis of Facebook.’ ‘Basijis’ in the Persian language means the members of Basij or people who follow the lifestyle of Basij members. Basij is a militia, which takes its orders from the supreme leader and the Iranian revolutionary guard (http://news.bbc.co.uk/, 2009).

Figure 38: Facebook discourse - example 3

The Iranian supreme leader and his supporters are basically against the Internet, social media, and especially Facebook; nevertheless, they cannot ignore the power of Facebook to share their message especially with people outside Iran, however using Persian language, which is not very common outside Iran, shows that they try to target Persian speakers who mainly are Iranians. Recently, Iranian politicians have started using Twitter more and almost all Iranian politicians including the supreme leader, president and foreign minister have Twitter accounts and tweet. However, similar to Facebook, Twitter is blocked for Iranians. The photo below depicts the Twitter pages for the supreme leader and the president of Iran. They usually tweet not only in the Persian language but also in English or Arabic languages.

Figure 39: The Twitter pages of the Iranian supreme leader and the Iranian president

Because of the law no Iranian governmental institution is active on Facebook. In comparison, in New Zealand, many governmental organizations use the popularity of Facebook to share their messages among people. For example, the page below shows the Facebook page of the New Zealand Ministry of Education and shows how they use the accessibility of Facebook to reach people and inform them.

Figure 40: Facebook discourse - example 4

7.3.1.1 Negotiating with countries

Facebook, as a private company that makes money from its users, is interested in reaching more countries and more people all over the world. Therefore, when countries with a considerable population filter Facebook so that it cannot be accessed, that means less profit for the company, which is against its business interests. In addition, in the absence of Facebook, it is possible that some other social networking websites may become popular, which is a threat to Facebook's monopolization of the online social networking market. For example, Facebook cannot ignore a country like China. In China, with the largest population in the world, the government blocks Facebook, while some other social networking websites are allowed to work. Thus, Facebook's company attempts to negotiate and reach an agreement with the Chinese Government to remove the filter on the Facebook platform in the country (wsj.com, 2017). According to *The New York Times* (2016) Facebook tried to develop a new censorship tool that could convince the Chinese government to allow Facebook to get back into China.

7.3.2 The relationship between Facebook and COCs in Iran and New Zealand

Iran and New Zealand differ in how COCs use Facebook to promote their business or services. COCs who work inside Iran do not use Facebook, however they are very active on Instagram, which is not blocked in the country. Iran-based corporations do not tend to use social media platforms to promote their businesses, but some illegal, or small and low-budget businesses, are active on Facebook as well as other social media platforms. Apart from the legal situation of Facebook in Iran, other factors such as the speed and security of the Internet, and the weak infrastructure of online banking, limit the commercial use of social media. Iranian banks are not connected to international banking systems, and international banking cards such as Visa or MasterCard are not available in Iran. This makes online marketing more difficult for Iranian corporations. Small businesses active on Facebook tend to relate to buying

and selling goods such as alcoholic drinks, or pets, or even prostitution (which are illegal or not accepted by the government's promoted values), or to buying and selling clothes and second-hand items. Therefore, in Iran, the most active businesses on Facebook are very small, local and personal, so usually are not tied to big promotional campaigns or online transactions. For example, the page below shows a Facebook page in Iran, which is related to selling dogs, which is illegal in Iran.

Figure 41: Facebook discourse - example 5

Some Iranian interviewees talked about the presence of these businesses on Facebook. For example:

> It is called underground black market…. these sort of business [that are banned]. So, when it is banned, similar to [Facebook which is their] medium and it is banned. Both business and medium are banned so you can find these things [businesses] over there [on Facebook]. It's not weird (IR3).

In comparison, in New Zealand almost all interviewees mentioned the importance of big businesses in their daily lives on Facebook. However, occasionally advertisements for selling

illegal things such as drugs can appear on Facebook in New Zealand. Usually, the page managers quickly remove these advertisements.

7.3.3 Facebook and regular individual users' power relationship in Iran and New Zealand

Regular individual Facebook users produce the largest amount of shared content on Facebook, and they are the main business target of the COCs and Facebook. In terms of discourse, the relationship between regular users and Facebook has three possible variations: the user accepts Facebook's discourse, which is imposed on the users via the Facebook platform and policies, and uses it; the user does not accept Facebook's discourse but still uses it; or the user does not accept Facebook's discourse and power and does not use Facebook.

7.3.4 How Facebook imposes its power on users

Facebook usually applies two main strategies to impose and protect its power. First of all, the Facebook interface is not neutral and conveys norms, values, and preferences, and offers some special activities to the users, as discussed in Chapter 3. The second strategy is Facebook's content management system, which removes content that is against Facebook rules and interests through censorship (Galloway, 2004). Although these rules and values are advertised as commonly accepted around the world, some participants in the interviews argued that Facebook is designed in accordance with American cultural values. Hence, Facebook usually imposes a certain system of socio-cultural values by its rules and its interface. For example, in relation to the available options in a Facebook search for people, which will be discussed in more detail below, an interviewee said:

> It's possible that since Facebook has developed in California in the US, they don't really have that same kind of cultural [concern], and maybe they haven't even realised that. ... And you know, the majority shareholders of Facebook are American, the

majority who work for Facebook are American, and so it's quite possible that they just didn't realise [these needs] (NZ2).

7.3.4.1 The interface of Facebook as a discourse

Facebook suggests norms and values that are in harmony with American norms and values.

Thus, Facebook as a social networking website is suitable for making online societies in line with the American definition of a society and offers the individualistic American social norms of a society to its users (Na et al., 2015).

The norms of how people find each other on Facebook, how they introduce themselves, and how they keep their privacy on Facebook, will be explained as examples of Facebook values and norms in the next sections. Some interviewees also have mentioned the effect of American norms and values on Facebook. For example, when I asked why they think Facebook does not make it possible to search for people based on their ethnicity or religion, one interviewee argued: '…because it [Facebook] is a westernised system. It was built by westerners, wasn't it? I'm pretty sure it is... (NZ3).'

However, some Iranian and New Zealand interviewees had a different idea and considered ethnicity or religion as private things that people should not reveal on Facebook. For example:

> I think [it] is not because people don't love the religion that we believe in. If you're Muslim or you're Christian or Jew, it's just you [and you] don't like to have that kind of information on your platform on your social media. Yeah, I think people are okay with [sharing something like the name of] their city but especially when it comes to religion people try not to [share] (IR3).

The rest of this section will discuss a few examples of how Facebook's interface dictates American values to users.

The first interaction between a potential Facebook user and the Facebook platform is when a person decides to make a Facebook account. People can make a Facebook account only if they are more than 13 years old. In addition, users on Facebook are known only by their chosen name. Although choosing a Facebook name has some policies (facebook.com, 2018), these policies are loose enough to allow people to choose a nickname not related to their everyday name. This can reflect the importance of individuals on Facebook rather than people as members of a social network, ethnic group, religious group or family. Also, this feature makes it possible for the users to build a connection with other communities, which they want to keep separate from their families and traditional groups. Facebook users introduce themselves by name and make their own online identity, which agrees with western individualist culture. However, in some other societies, such as Iran, traditionally a person exists as a member of an extended family and the family name is more representative of the identity of the person than their first name. Also, in New Zealand, for example, Māori traditionally introduce themselves with a *mihi*, which is a complete introduction about their relationship to their tribe, parents, and geography (otago.ac.nz, 2020). However, when they use Facebook, by default they use only their name or nickname to introduce themselves. Facebook gives the opportunity to its users to write an introduction or biography about themselves and some people use this introduction to write about their *mihi* or other aspects of their identity such as their *iwi* (tribe), however, unlike the name of the person this introduction is not searchable. The cultural value system of Facebook is more in line with European New Zealand culture than Māori or Iranian traditions. However, the comparison of individualism factors between Iran and New Zealand, as presented in Figure 2, Chapter 1, shows that in general New Zealand society has less problem with this individualistic approach of Facebook than Iran.

Finding people

As mentioned in Chapter 2, searching for friends or other people is one of the most popular uses of Facebook. However, as shown in the photo below, this search does not include some important factors in traditional societies such as Iran. The main search fields for finding a friend on Facebook are the name of a person, hometown, current city, high school, mutual friends, college or university, employer, and graduate school. These factors are important in finding old friends, however, to make new friends in a society like Iran, some other factors such as cultural background, language or ethnicity, and religion are more important factors in the real world (Rahimi, 2017), and these are not reflected on Facebook. In New Zealand, as a secular and individualist country, factors like ethnicity or religion might be less important than in Iran. However, it is apparent from the interviews that most interviewees do not think about the importance of these items for their online activities and have accepted what Facebook has presented to them.

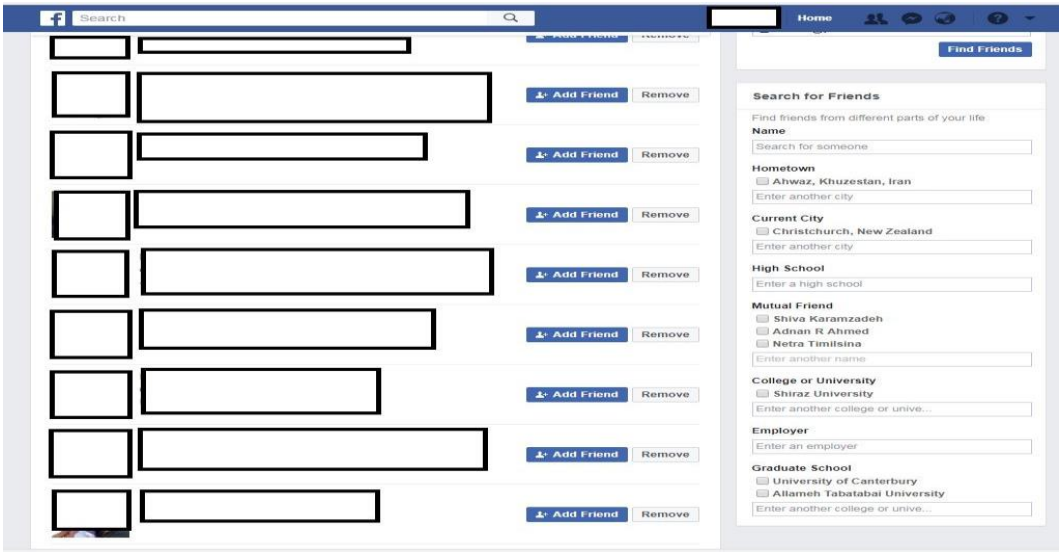


Figure 42: Facebook discourse - example 11

Privacy settings

Facebook privacy settings give an opportunity for users to manage what information can be accessible to others. Facebook users are able to keep information such as their friends list hidden and not exposed to others. However, in some countries such as Iran, traditionally this

type of information should not be hidden from people's family and sometimes their social networks. Normally, the family or even social network is allowed to know about this information and hiding this information is not accepted in the society. The origin of all these differences is the individualist basis of social networking websites such as Facebook, which is in contrast with most of the traditional family values in Iran and causes some stress for many families whose members use the Internet and social media (Khosravi Zohreh, 2011). The photo below shows the privacy setting page of Facebook and different options that it gives to the users.

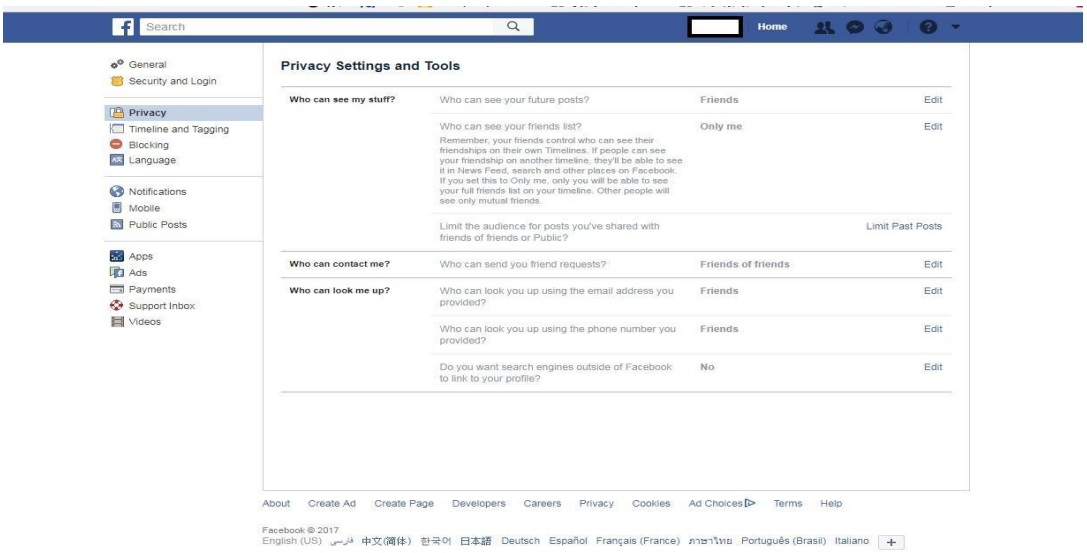


Figure 43: Facebook discourse - example 12

Looking at the Facebook interface and the actions it affords and recommends reveals that Facebook assumes American values for its users and, normally, Facebook users from different societies and cultures should behave in accordance with American individualistic values and norms.

7.3.4.2 Content Management rules by Facebook

The second way that Facebook expresses its power to its users is through content management rules. Facebook applies censorship in two main ways: by deleting accounts; or by censoring posts, comments, photos, or any other type of shared content.

Facebook censorship

Facebook's managers always claim that Facebook has been created to increase freedom of speech and give an opportunity to people all over the world to express their opinions. However, Facebook sometimes censors people's shared messages. The Facebook policy outlines three bases for censorship: hate speech, adult content and nudity, and graphic violence. However, how these rules are interpreted and applied is important. Facebook has a group of employees who review posts and censor what they believe is inappropriate; recently, they increased the number of their censorship team from 4,500 up to 7,500 and then to 20,000 people (Maclellan, 2019).

Although Facebook claims to protect vulnerable groups against hate speech, this protection looks imbalanced, which can indicate the choices of Facebook managers. For example, after the terrorist attack in London in 2017, a congressman in the United States posted the statement 'Hunt them, identify them, and kill them,' which was not recognised as breaching Facebook rules about hate speech, because the page owner claimed it was about 'radicalised' Muslims rather than all Muslims (propublica.org, 2017). Recently, Facebook and YouTube have blocked more than 50 accounts that they claimed were related to the Iranian government. Although most of these accounts had real names and identifications, for example, one of them was for an Iranian TV channel, they were closed based on the United States policy of preventing influence on future U.S elections. However, in many cases other countries do not have this influence on online giant companies to block the accounts of their enemies. To

identify different organizations as terrorist, Facebook has not followed a clear policy and there are many examples of the influence on American foreign policy, or the relationship between Facebook and the governments, on putting different groups on the terrorist list. For example, in January 2020 the U.S assassinated an Iranian Major General, Qasem Soleimani, in Iraq, and some Iranians shared his photos on their Instagram pages. Instagram, which is owned by Facebook Company, removed photos of the killed commander and blocked some users' accounts. To explain the reason for removing photos and blocking accounts the company explained that they should follow the U.S rules and sanctions against Iran (bbc.com/persian, 2020). Yet, the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* found that 41 out of 46 terrorist groups that were actively against, and banned by, the Pakistan government, were freely active on Facebook (dawn.com, 2017). In another example, according to Aljazeera many Kurds signed a petition asking Mark Zuckerberg to change Facebook's censorship policy since they were concerned that Facebook was cooperating with the Turkish government to undermine Kurdish political and cultural content (aljazeera.com, 2013).

Some people believe Facebook is too big to be managed and regulated adequately. For example, Carl Miller, research director at the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media at the Demos think-tank, said, 'We do not have the right regulatory paradigm for these globe-striding technology giants…We treat them like neutral utility companies but they are value-maximizing commercial entities (theguardian.com, 2016).' Robert McChesney argues that giant companies are potential dangers to capitalism as well as democracies, because in an unfair competition they do not let small businesses grow (theguardian.com, 2016).

Some of the participants in this study have also talked about censorship on Facebook. Among Iranian and New Zealand interviewees it was easy to find ideas to both support and oppose the

censorship in Facebook. For example, an interviewee mentioned: ‘I don’t know if I am ever against censorship …. it definitely has a role to play’ (NZ3).

While another person said:

> If you remove anyone’s content, that’s censorship. Right? Like, whether that’s not allowing nudity on the platform, or I think I’ve heard something about them launching a campaign against fake news. Yeah. Which is a pretty big one, because depending on the definition of fake news. That’s probably the biggest issue of censorship I can think of on Facebook, because how do you deem that an opinion is fake news or it’s wrong? Who’s making these decisions? Where are they based? You’re just going to be [seeing] one side of issues I feel. I think it’s a very slippery slope (NZ2).

In addition to the censorship that may reflect a particular set of values, Facebook could be accused of censoring content which has a different connotation than their first possible classification. For example, for a long time Facebook classified breastfeeding photos under the nudity category and censored them. However, many people objected because that meant censoring the photos of breast cancer awareness or breastfeeding of children (theguardian.com, 2016). Another example is the photo below which is a famous photo from the Vietnam War illustrating the fear and misery of children in the war, which Facebook had classified as child nudity and censored accordingly. Some scholars accused Facebook of abusing its power by deleting this photo (reuters.com, 2016).

Figure 44: Facebook discourse - example 13. Photographer: Nick Ut. The photo details are presented in appendix D

The previous sections described how Facebook imposes its power on its users and the next three sections discuss how regular users manage their relationship with Facebook and react towards the power of Facebook.

7.3.4.3 Users accept what Facebook presents to them and use Facebook

The affordances of the Facebook platform are the result of the designers' contemplation of the platform. The Facebook platform affords some activities such as sharing content or messaging other users. Facebook users usually can fulfil their intentions through these predefined Facebook applications. These users, who form the majority of Facebook users, do not define new functions for the Facebook platform and they generally follow what Facebook offers them (Baek et al., 2011). Many studies show that people usually use Facebook to keep in contact with their friends and family, read the news, and meet new people; almost all these functions have already been designed in the Facebook platform (Madge, 2007; Smock et al., 2011). As previously mentioned, most interviewees accept Facebook affordances as they are presented to them and do not think of more possible affordances.

The importance of different affordances of Facebook for its users can change according to the political and economic conditions in a country. In the questionnaire the respondents answered questions about the influence of political or economic conditions in their country on the importance of Facebook affordances for them.

Table 14 below shows the answers to those questions.

Table 14: The influence of economic and political conditions on the importance of Facebook affordances for Iranian and New Zealander respondents.

1= extremely important 5= not important at all

Item	IR	Number of answers (IR)	NZ	Number of answers (NZ)
Facebook enables me to keep my personal information private	2.94	34	1.068	34
Influence of political environment	2.65	32	2.80	35
Influence of economic environment	2.97	34	2.97	36
Facebook enables me to access the information I need	2.73	34	2.51	35
Influence of political environment	2.43	32	3.23	35
Influence of economic environment	2.76	34	3.40	35
Facebook enables me to build or expand my social network	2.93	32	2.63	35
Influence of political environment	2.80	30	3.29	35
Influence of economic environment	2.96	30	3.57	35
Facebook enables me to comment on or criticise different topics rather than only be an observer.	3.5	33	2.91	34
Influence of political environment	3.58	31	2.78	32
Influence of economic environment	3.24	31	3.32	34
Facebook enables me to exchange the information with other users fast	2.5	34	1.52	31
Influence of political environment	2.29	34	3.09	33
Influence of economic environment	3.42	31	3.21	34
Facebook is attractive because it uses different media formats such as audio, video, photo and text at the same time	3.23	30	2.00	33
Influence of political environment	2.67	28	3.03	33
Influence of economic environment	2.96	30	3.24	34
Facebook enables me to have a persistent engagement in different issues	2.53	32	2.65	34
Influence of political environment	2.96	28	2.68	34

Influence of economic environment	2.90	31	3.15	34
Facebook enables me to access a big range of audience despite the distance and time barriers	2.39	33	2.64	33
Influence of political environment	2.43	30	3.16	32
Influence of economic environment	2.63	33	3.28	32
Facebook enables me to collaborate with other people with the same interests to take actions	2.35	34	2.59	32
Influence of political environment	3.65	29	2.91	33
Influence of economic environment	2.96	30	3.26	34
Facebook helps me learn new things	2.76	34	2.45	33
Influence of political environment	2.33	30	2.97	34
Influence of economic environment	2.53	32	3.26	34
Facebook is a good way for me to run my business and make money	3.57	26	4.35	34
Influence of political environment	2.72	25	4.12	34
Influence of economic environment	3.00	25	4.00	34
Facebook enables me to use the media content, which is not easily available on other media platforms such as TV, newspapers, cinema, and radio in my country.	2.30	33	2.74	34
Influence of political environment	2.60	30	3.29	34
Influence of economic environment	2.83	30	3.55	34

This table reveals some similarities and differences between important affordances for Iranian and New Zealand respondents. Reviewing the table shows that differences in the importance of affordances sometimes have been influenced by political or economic conditions in the country.

The first item – 'Facebook enables me to keep my personal information private' – shows an obvious difference in the importance of this item for New Zealand respondents. This difference could be because Iranian users think that they can't keep their information on Facebook private. This agrees with what some of the Iranian interviewees mentioned about the feeling of being in danger of scrutiny by the government in Iran.

Other items which clearly have more importance for New Zealand respondents than Iranians are: 'Facebook enables me to comment on or criticise different topics rather than only be an observer' – this is in accordance with what already had been observed on Facebook pages and

discussed in Chapter 6. ‘Facebook enables me to exchange the information with other users fast’; ‘Facebook is attractive because it uses different media formats such as audio, video, photo and text at the same time’ – this difference could be influenced by the price of accessing the Internet in Iran that stops users from using all multimedia aspects of Facebook so as to use less data. This point was mentioned by an interviewee in Chapter 6.

According to the table, some items are more important to Iranians, such as ‘Facebook enables me to access a big range of audience despite the distance and time barriers’; ‘Facebook enables me to collaborate with other people with the same interests to take actions’; ‘Facebook enables me to use the media content which is not easily available on other media platforms such as TV, newspapers, cinema, and radio in my country.’ In general, these items are related to the barriers in the society that limit access to people and media content out of Iran. However, Iranian respondents have not highlighted the effect of politics or the economy on the importance of these items. This may indicate that the respondents do not consider using Facebook to be as political as the Iranian government considers it to be.

Some items such as: ‘Facebook is a good way for me to run my business and make money’; ‘Facebook helps me learn new things’; ‘Facebook enables me to collaborate with other people with the same interests to take actions’, and ‘Facebook enables me to have a persistent engagement in different issues,’ have similar importance for the respondents, however, in some cases they see the effect of political and economic conditions on their answers differently.

7.3.4.4 Users accept Facebook but modify it according to their needs

The popularity and availability of Facebook make it very difficult for different people and groups to ignore it. However, Facebook sometimes does not have the facilities required by

some users. These users define new functions for Facebook affordances according to their goals and needs. A recent highlighted example of using Facebook and social media for special purposes was how social media platforms were used by the terrorist group ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) to recruit new members, train them, and plan terror activities (Farwell, 2014).

Reviewing the political usages of Facebook shows that in countries with less freedom of speech and stricter laws, people try to use Facebook in ways that evade these limitations (Iskander, 2011). One of the most highlighted roles that Facebook has played in Iran was in the 2009 presidential election, and the protests following the election, known as the Green Movement. Protesters often used Facebook and Twitter to organise their gatherings and distribute news. Hence, using Facebook and Twitter during the Green Movement was the main reason that the government blocked these two social media platforms. In an interview, Saeed Shariati, one of the main campaigners of the reformist political party in Iran, says they decided to use the Internet as their 'key weapon', like a 'military air force in the campaign' to share their message, because they could not use television or the press for their campaign (Al Jazeera, 2009). Some Iranian interviewees have identified the Green Movement as a significant user of Facebook in Iran, for example:

> ... I did not use Facebook at that time [in 2009]. I heard that lots of people was [*sic*] using Facebook to kind of informing each other of the new places for the protest and get together and then going all together to different places [to protest] (IR5).

Modifying Facebook for many users appears to be a normal part of using Facebook. For example, when interviewees were asked about what Facebook does not offer to the users in terms of searching for people based on their ethnicity or religion, two points were very clear.

First, many interviewees tries to justify why Facebook does not give this option to the users. Secondly, they tried to invent a solution or suggest a tip or trick to resolve this problem, for example:

> I mean, there's the groups [for] religion, like you know, they have Facebook groups. And then people can just apply then find people there. So maybe that's an alternative. But I do not know why they wouldn't have, maybe Facebook needs to do [*sic*] some cultural considerations (NZ4).

This topic will be discussed in the next section.

7.3.4.5 People who do not accept the Facebook power and do not use it

The big number of Facebook users is an attractive factor for many researchers, and the importance and influence of Facebook has overshadowed the reasons why some people do not use Facebook. Recently, after revealing the story of how Facebook users' data were abused by Cambridge Analytica (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018), many Facebook users decided to leave the platform to show their objection to Facebook's policy of protecting people's private data. For example, some celebrities and companies deleted their Facebook accounts and ran a campaign to encourage people to leave Facebook (slate.com, 2018).

In Iran, people who do not use Facebook, even if they can have access to the Internet and Facebook, usually are those who either follow the law because they accept the dominant political discourse, or are afraid of breaking the law, or who prefer to use some other platforms such as Instagram, which is currently not blocked in Iran. In New Zealand, using or not using Facebook remains a personal decision for people.

Showing less interest in using Facebook among younger generations has been mentioned by some interviewees, however, this needs a separate study as, in general, researchers are more

interested in reasons for using than reasons for not using Facebook; this could be a gap in this field of study.

7.3.4.6 People who do not accept the Facebook rules and power but still use it

Similar to many other technologies, some people do not accept, and even criticise, the Facebook company because of the rules and its attitude towards the users, however, they still use the Facebook platform to spread their message. In fact, these Facebook users have defined a new function for Facebook and use it as a tool to resist Facebook itself. In the example below, the page administrator clarifies that if s/he has a Facebook account it does not mean there is no right for them to criticise Facebook and have a page which is anti-Facebook. The current research has not identified any Facebook page with an explicit anti-Facebook sentence in either Iran or New Zealand.

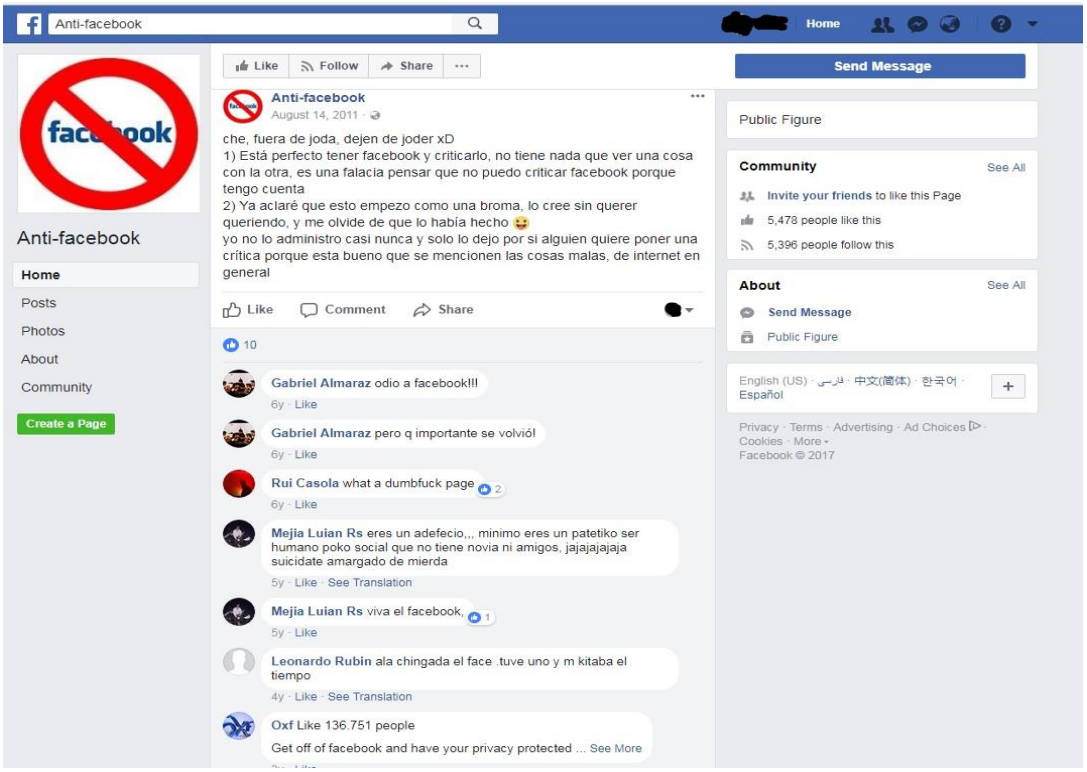


Figure 45: Facebook discourse - example 8

7.4 Resistance

According to Foucault, wherever power exists there is resistance. Discourse is the context of power, the context that not only approves and legitimises the power but also alternative discourses challenge and resist the power (Negm, 2015). Thus, it is logical to expect resistance against all types of power in the dominant discourse in Facebook. Fairclough (cited in Hjlem, 2014) argues that discourse establishes social identities or objects, the relationship between objects, and the system of knowledge. Facebook, like other social media, has given this opportunity to the users to resist all these three mentioned functions of a discourse. This ability of the social media and specifically Facebook is because of the decentralization of power, and weakening hierarchical control over knowledge, as important influences of the social media on society (Curran, 2012). It is expected that on Facebook resistance appears against these three mentioned aspects of a discourse. Resistance to the first two aspects, creating identities as well as the relationship between objects, is very apparent in Facebook use in Iran. This might be because of the limitations that people feel with respect to constructing their social identity according to their wishes. For example, based on the law and Islamic discourse, Iranian women must wear hijab in public spaces, but Facebook is a public place where many Iranian women share their photos without hijab, on their own pages. They create an online identity, which is different from their public identity in the real-world streets or workplace. However, in New Zealand, people are usually free to build and present their own identity, and based on the law, other people and the government has no right to stop them. Therefore, their online identity on Facebook is more likely to be close to their identity in real life. Many Iranian women try to hide their online identity by choosing a Facebook nickname that is totally different from their real name. Although for most of these women this activity does not have a political purpose, it might have a political interpretation as being against the dominant discourse and law. As Phelan and Dahlberg say:

> Post-Marxist discourse theory reminds us that all creative human activity holds the potential for political transformative capacity. But to understand how this potential can be translated into a reality requires an appreciation of the enduring social and political relations that surround and pre-exist certain individuals and their relations with others(Phelan and Dahlberg, p. 196, 2011)

According to Howard (2010), in most Muslim countries, there are several websites that are not directly related to politics but which have a political function as they present an opportunity to civilians to debate sensitive or banned topics in their society (Howard, 2010). Vicars and McKenna (2014) have called these activities 'micro resistance' (p. 74), which happens when there is not an approved system of resistance against the dominant discourse. In addition, Iranian women sometimes share their photos and videos without hijab purposefully to fight for their desired identity and to resist against the approved and legitimised relationship between men and women by the dominant discourse.

The photo below shows the Facebook page of 'My Stealthy Freedom', an anti-compulsory-hijab movement in Iran. According to Phelan and Dahlberg (2011), new social movements are the 'movements of the movements', or a 'network of networks', meaning that people with different national contexts and different network memberships can form a movement based on their common goals or values rather than traditional factors such as class. In these movements, politics is not the only reason for engagement, but people who participate are mainly concerned about social practices or discourses based on social behaviours, current social conditions, or identity (Phelan & Dahlberg, 2011). This is happening on the 'My Stealthy Freedom's' Facebook page. This Facebook page has created an important resistance

movement against the dominant power in Iran. Watching the shared videos on this page indicates that people from very different social backgrounds join and act to achieve the same goal, which is resistance against the compulsory hijab in Iran.

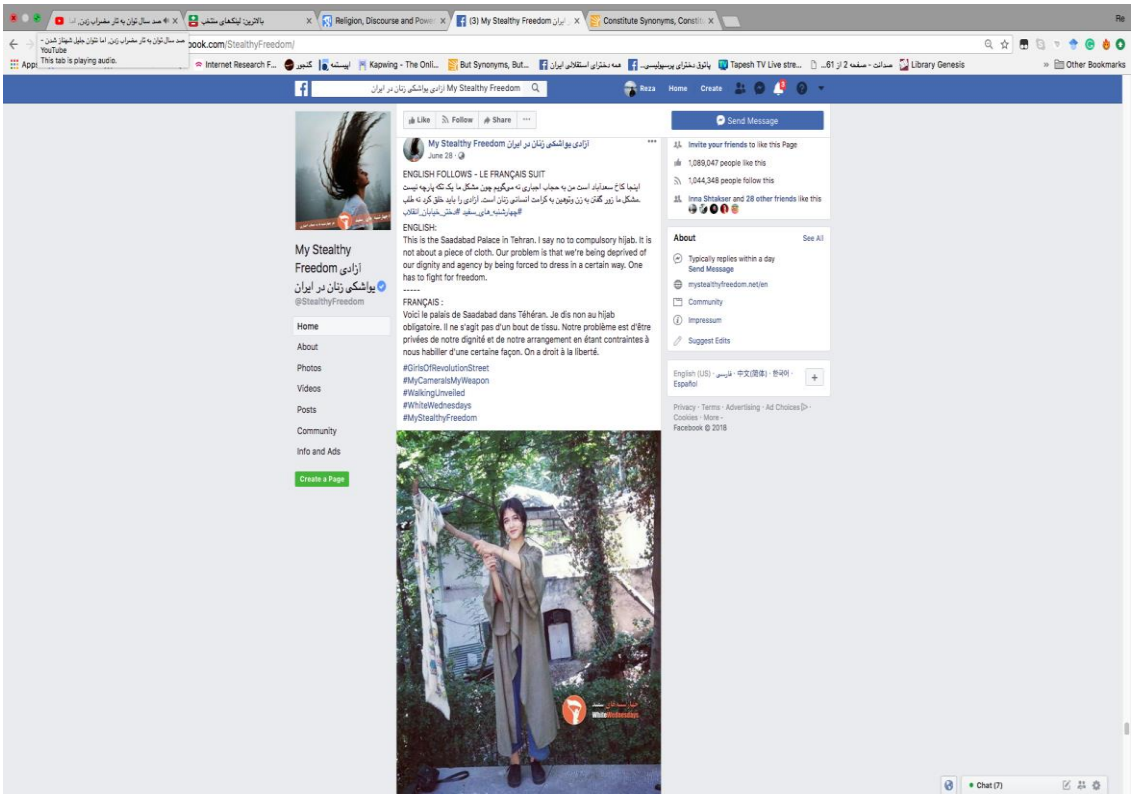


Figure 46: Resistance in Facebook - example 1

In terms of constructing social relationships, in Iran some forms of social relationships are restricted by the society or government and many people use Facebook to overcome the barriers and limitations. For example, relationships between girls and boys, if they are not married, in public, is not accepted by the government, and it often can have consequences. However, people use social media, especially Facebook, to evade these limitations. People can make friends from different genders, countries, religions, etc., which all could be against the approval of the dominant discourse. In contrast, in New Zealand, these activities are not considered to be against the dominant discourse and people do not need to break the law or norms to find friends or relationships.

Another limitation for women in Iran is that they are not allowed to enter stadiums and watch football matches. The main excuse of the government for this decision is that stadiums are full of men who might speak inappropriately and disrespect women. In fact, the government attempts to define the relationship between women and men and keep them separated; however, Facebook gives them an opportunity to join fan pages and be as engaged as men in discussions around football or other sports. This is how women resist the dominant discourse by defining a new online relationship with male supporters of sports on Facebook. The photo below shows a Facebook page named 'Dokhtarane Esteghlali', which means the girls who support 'Esteghal', a football team in Iran. Although the page name indicates that the page is for girls, the photo of the page, and a review of the members and comments, show that both girls and boys are active on this page and discuss football.

Figure 47: Resistance in Facebook - example 2

While in Iran the majority of online resistance activities refer to creating new identities and relationships, which target the ruling political discourse radically, in New Zealand some people use Facebook to resist the economic system, which gets less attention from Iranian

Facebook users. From a post-Marxist point of view, the economy is as discursive as politics or culture, because the economy is not only about materials but also about relations between materials, tools, people etc. (Phelan & Dahlberg, 2011). For example, the photo below shows a Facebook page which has been made to criticise Countdown supermarkets. However, the page managers are connecting the shopping activity to the whole world and focusing on the relationship between people, companies, and the dominant discourse.

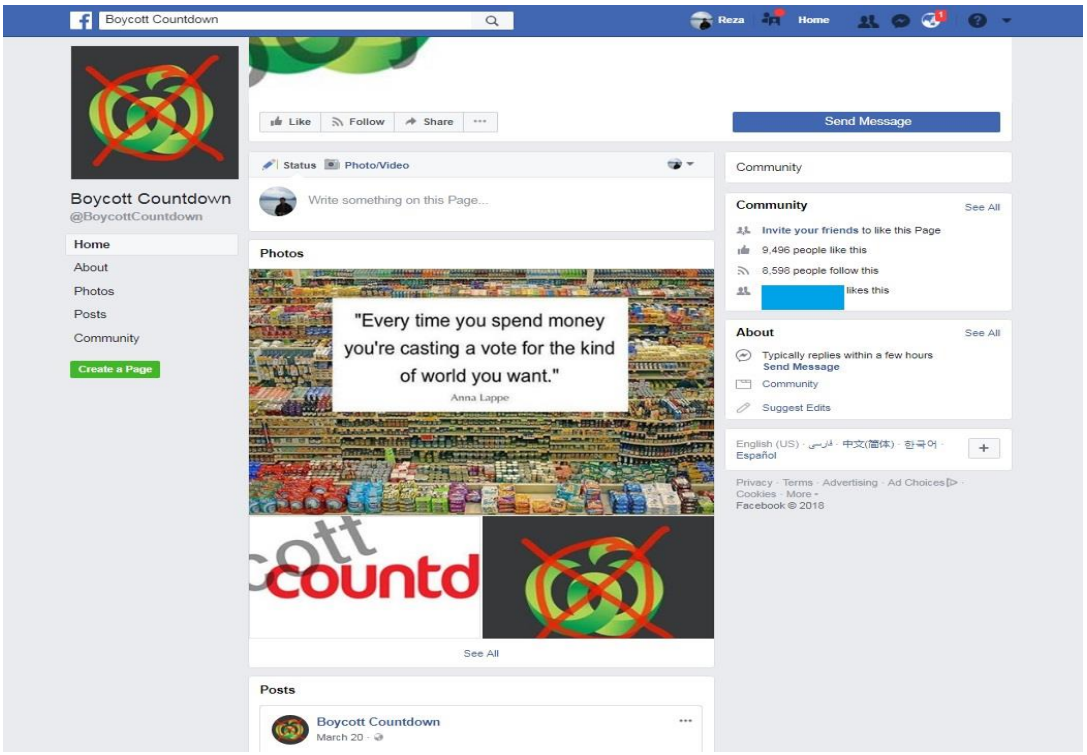


Figure 48: Resistance in Facebook - example 3

It seems in New Zealand Facebook resistance activities can target the whole system or just criticise specific cases, while in Iran the majority of resistance activities are targeting the whole dominant discourse. In another example, a New Zealand Facebook user criticises McDonald's because it serves Muslims with 'halal' meat. Although the company may consider Muslims as potential customers who can be a source of profit, some users have a different point of view and ask McDonald's to change its relationship with Muslim customers.

Figure 49: Resistance in Facebook-example 4

In another example, when a New Zealand chocolate company used a very famous international celebrity to promote their new product, some users challenged this decision. They believe that this is a famous New Zealand brand and New Zealand celebrities should promote it. These users indirectly promote the idea of localism or nationalism rather than globalisation, which is against the expected relationships of globalisation.

Figure 50: Resistance in Facebook - example 5

Caring about national products was also mentioned by a New Zealand interviewee:

> …And I guess also in New Zealand kiwi culture, if you could call it so, a lot of people definitely have a really strong attachment to brands, especially New Zealand brands. If you think about Whittaker's for example. … A lot of the whole idea of Kiwi culture I suppose is attached to food. (NZ5)

Sometimes Facebook users take advantage of any opportunity to express their ideas, criticise the dominant discourse, and promote an alternative discourse. In the example below, when the supermarket chain Countdown posted a question on their Facebook page, a Facebook user used the commenting opportunity to criticise the company's policy on stocking eggs from cage-reared chickens, and calling it unethical. However, the comment was not related directly to the question. This comment could be considered as a promotion for an alternative discourse and caring about animal rights more than making commercial benefits.

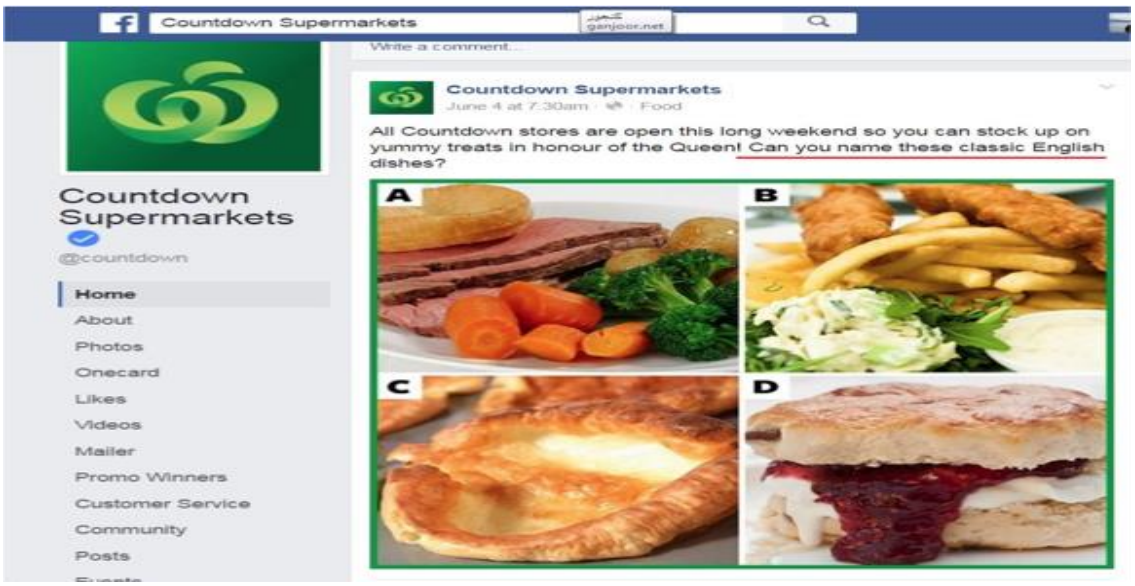


Figure 51: Resistance in Facebook - example 6

Wilson and Stapleton (2007) argue that sometimes using harsh and vulgar language could be a sign of resistance. Mayr (2003) studied resistance in British prisons and argues that resistance shows itself by challenging the formal language and behaving in a way that is deemed as vulgar behaviour by prisoners. The photo below shows when the England Rugby team beat the New Zealand Rugby team in the world cup 2019, a Facebook user used the opportunity to connect that to historical issues through use of harsh and vulgar language.

Figure 52: Resistance in Facebook - example 7

This type of resistance happens among Iranian Facebook users as well, however the frequency of that is greater than in New Zealand, and comments also quickly become radical and against the whole social system. For example the photo below is about the loss by the Iranian National Football team against Iraq in 2019. This post is from a Facebook page for football fans.

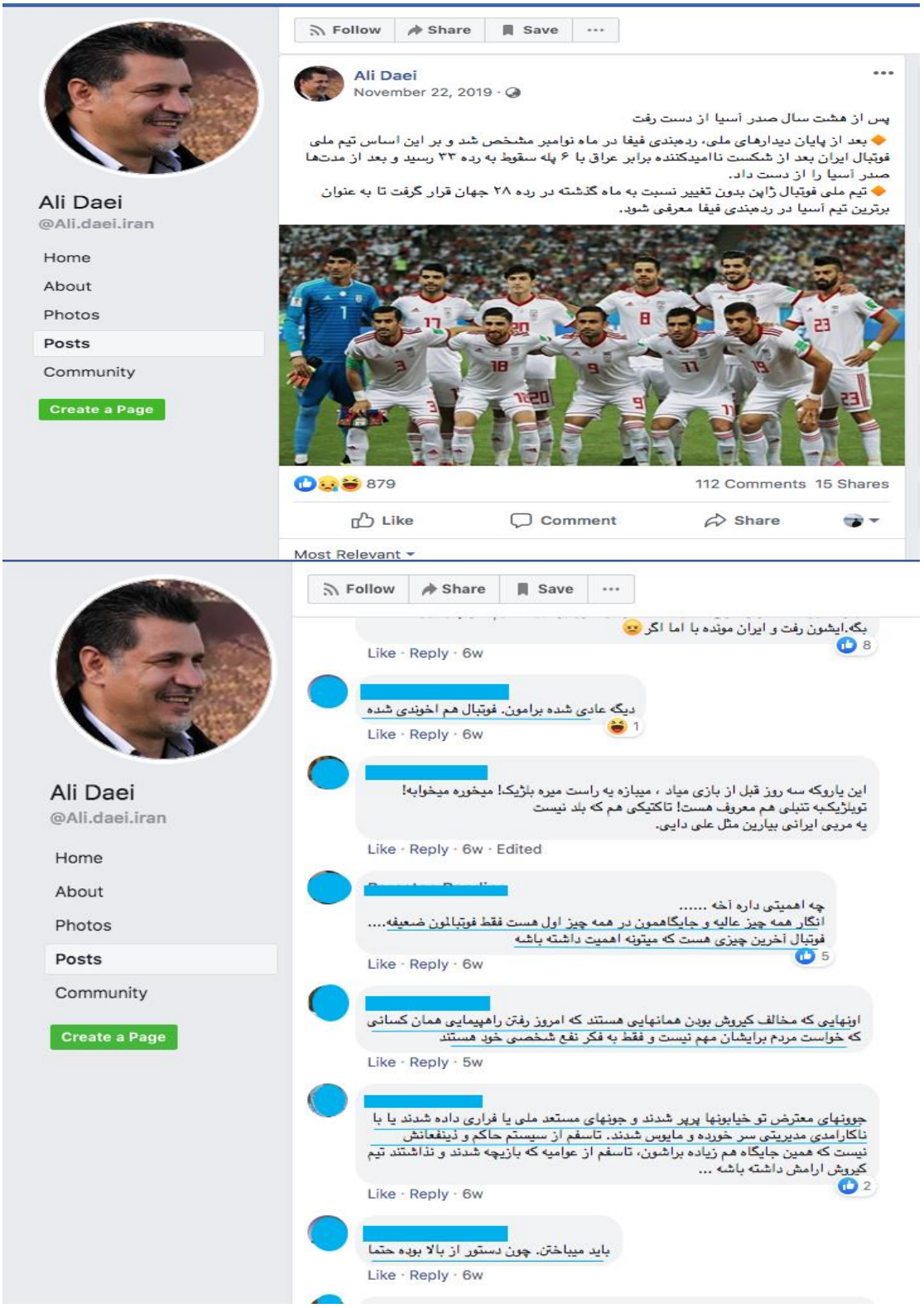


Figure 53: Resistance in Facebook - example 8

The first comment says: ‘We are accustomed to it, Football has been affected by [ruling] clergymen,’ and the second underlined comment says, ‘Do you think everything is perfect and only our football is not very good?. Football is the least important thing…’ and the other

underlined comments also criticise the dominant political system.

The third function of discourse, according to Fairclough (2001), is establishing a system of knowledge; this is where most of the resistance against the dominant discourse happens in both New Zealand and Iran. People can use social media to distribute different interpretations of the same stories, based on a different discourse and value system. According to Durant (2010), the meaning of a text is about the competition of different perspectives and discourses over meaning; all competitive discourses suggest a different meaning for the same text (Durant, 2010). As Fenton (2008) argues:

> In the field of media, communication and cultural studies being oppositional or active social agents have invariably come under the banner of 'resistance'. The active audience resists the hegemonic representation in the text. Subcultures form acts of resistance displaying their profound aversion to particular socio-political conditions in various ways. Journalists resist owner and editorial preferences through the sharing of collective professional values. Alternative media resist the frames, codes, and practice of mainstream media through forms of organization, the means of production and modes of distribution (Fenton, 2008 p. 232).

In the example below, the shared news is about how a celebrity had donated twenty thousand dollars to feed hungry kids. The majority of comments are devoted to appreciating this action and how the celebrity had done a right and generous thing. However, some people used this opportunity to challenge the whole social system and the dominant discourse, which has resulted in inequalities in the society. These Facebook users have bridged the news to the

introduction of an alternative discursive critique on the origins of social inequalities in a capitalist society.

Figure 54: Resistance in Facebook - example 9

In Iran, criticizing the dominant discourse and power is not done as gently as in New Zealand,

as many users angrily comment about the dominant power. The photo below shows how some users react to a piece of news about a speech of the Iranian Supreme Leader. The news item reports that on World Labour Day the Iranian supreme leader asked people to buy what Iran produces inside the country and support the labourers.

In the comments many people think he is not honest in what he had said and insulted him, saying ‘he is saying bullshit’ or ‘he is a pimp,’ which is considered very insulting in Iran. Some users have attacked the panel participants who discussed this news on Manoto TV, and say ‘you are overseas and free to talk, if you are brave enough come inside the country and repeat these words.’

Figure 55: Resistance in Facebook - example 10

In the previous examples, Facebook was used as a medium to express the ideas and criticism of the dominant discourse online, while sometimes Facebook could be used as a media platform to plan social activities as well as resistance movements in the real world. One of the most highlighted examples of using Facebook as a medium to connect activists in Iran was the Green Movement, which we have discussed previously. However, there are many other examples of how Iranians used Facebook to plan activities that are considered to be against the dominant discourse. For example, in 2011 some youths planned a water-pistol fight on Facebook and hundreds of young boys and girls participated in the activity. The water fight received harsh criticism from conservative politicians and police arrested many of the youths who had participated in the event (theguardian.com, 2011).

Figure 56: Resistance in Facebook - example 11. Photo from (Ziyon, 2011)

In New Zealand one of the recent uses of Facebook for planning an activity was mentioned by one of the interviewees:

> There was an extinction rebellion event up in Wellington…they shut down the city. A lot of that was planned on Facebook. They have their own ways like their own communication to discuss stuff, which is a bit more sensitive, like the plans were to

actually get people involved and get everyone to converge in one place for one act even if these people don't necessarily know each other (NZ2).

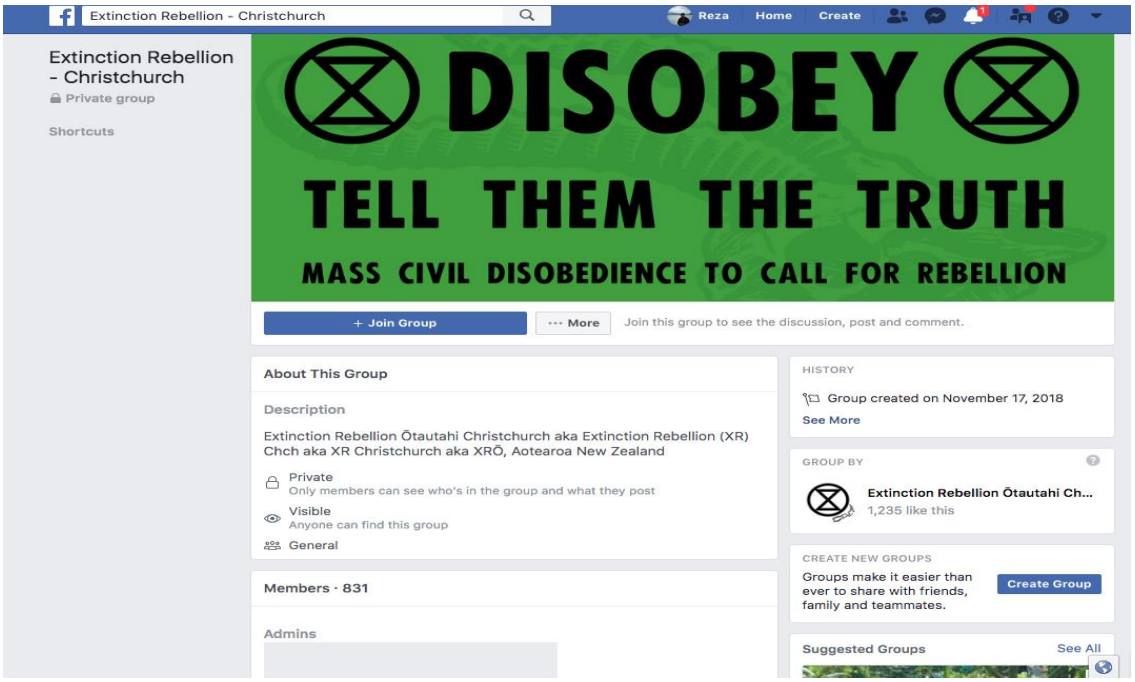


Figure 57: Resistance in Facebook - example 12. Extinction Rebellion Facebook page

7.4.1 Iranian pop music, counter-discourse and lifestyle on Facebook

In the previous chapters the importance of Facebook for alternative lifestyles, which are not accepted by the dominant discourse, have been discussed. Buying and selling alcohol, buying and selling pets, dance classes, mixed parties for boys and girls, and many other things which are available and advertised on Facebook are legally banned in Iran. Among all the aspects of alternative lifestyle, music has a particular importance. As the analysis of popular Facebook pages showed, many of the popular Facebook pages are for musicians, who are mainly exiled from Iran. After the 1978 Islamic revolution in Iran, the new Islamic government banned the production of pop music as it was considered a feature of the western culture. As Samim (2014) argues, the producers and consumers of this type of music never became accepted by the dominant system and were considered a counter-discourse and form of ideological resistance against the dominant discourse. These legal limitations on pop music pushed the

production of this music outside Iran and mainly to Los Angeles, where it was distributed to the underground markets, and then consumed in private spaces such as inside homes and cars, where the government did not have full control. The lack of any desired music in legal channels, according to Toosi and Yahak (2014), helped the popularity of the music that was produced in Los Angeles. Before the popularity of VHS video players in Iran, copying and selling audiotapes was the main way of distributing this music, which had attracted many listeners in the society. This is how pop music became the core of Iranian private life and the very first element of separating the private life of Iranians from their public life. Over time, although new technologies such as video players, DVD players, satellite TV receivers, and the Internet made other media productions such as movies or TV series accessible to Iranians, pop music maintained its role as a centre of the discourse of private life of many Iranians, which is a counter-discourse to the dominant political discourse of the society. Since the use of pop music, which was produced outside Iran, was very pervasive, to reduce the effect of this type of music on Iranians, after the year 2000 the Iranian government decided to allow some pop singers inside Iran to produce music under government control (Soroosh, 2015). Although the pop music industry inside Iran has developed, it is very influenced by the music produced in Los Angeles and because of that, significant discursive contradictions are still visible between the pop music produced inside Iran and the dominant discourse. These discursive contradictions between the government and newly permitted pop music inside Iran have resulted in the cancellation of many pop music concerts by the government, despite their initial permission (Farda, 2017). In Iran, the government reviews all songs to make sure of the appropriateness of the lyrics and melodies, according to the government's values and standards, and the difficulty of this bureaucratic procedure, as well as censorship by the conservative religious government, pushes many artists to produce their music underground. The market for underground music in Iran that usually challenges the dominant discourse

remains thriving (Rastovac, 2009). Although the reference looks dated, still this challenge between the underground music and the dominant discourse in Iran is continuing.

It is possible to summarise the discursive resistance on Facebook in Iran and New Zealand in the following points:

- In Iran, Facebook can be used to construct an online identity, which may be totally different from an individual's public identity. In Iran, online identities may not match with what the dominant discourse recommends, while in New Zealand the dominant discourse is more tolerant towards online and offline identities.
- In Iran, Facebook is sometimes used to do things that the dominant discourse does not legitimize. These include forming social relationships, which are not tolerated by the dominant discourse, or access to social places such as stadiums for women, which are not permissible through the dominant discourse. In New Zealand usually what people do on Facebook is also tolerated in the real world.
- Different tactics for criticising the dominant discourses on Facebook are being applied by Facebook users in both Iran and New Zealand.
- In New Zealand both radical change and soft reformist resistances could be observed on Facebook, while in Iran the majority of resistance actions ask for a radical discursive change.
- While in Iran most of the resistance activities on Facebook are targeting the national dominant discourse, In New Zealand some resistance movements have a more international identity. This usually can't be observed in Iranian Facebook activities.

7.5 Summary of the chapter

This chapter analysed the process of using Facebook in Iran and New Zealand using a Foucauldian discourse analysis. It discussed the relationship among different elements of the

whole process of using Facebook in Iran and New Zealand. In this chapter it is argued that Facebook and governments own the most of the power to control Facebook through policies, laws and their expertise, while regular Facebook users are the main producers of the content and knowledge on Facebook.

Facebook imposes its power on users via its interface, censorship, and content management. In turn, Facebook users, regular users and COCs, can use different strategies to deal with Facebook and governments' powers; sometimes they accept this power and follow the rules, sometimes they try to find new ways to cope with the power and follow their own desires also, and sometimes they do not accept the domination of Facebook or the government, and they resist it. As has been explained, some people resist Facebook by closing their Facebook account or simply not making a Facebook account from the outset. However, sometimes people use Facebook to resist the dominant discourses. Resistance of the dominant discourse in Iran and New Zealand can take various forms of intensity. This chapter suggests that the intensity of online resistance in these countries is influenced by the political conditions of the country. When people have more rights to express their opinion freely, their online criticism of the dominant discourse becomes softer and less radical.

8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The research question of this thesis asks how political and economic conditions in Iran and New Zealand influence how tertiary students use Facebook in those countries. This chapter addresses the results of the study and considers how this study can contribute to knowledge in the field of social media and especially Facebook, and how it can help the future studies in this field. This thesis has applied different techniques of collecting data, such as observation, interviews, document reviews, and questionnaires, to study Facebook use by tertiary students and the political and economic conditions in Iran and New Zealand. In addition, different qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques answer the research question. Chapters 4, 5 and 6, analysed different aspects of the influence of political and economic conditions on Facebook use in Iran and New Zealand.

The thesis argues that major differences in political and economic conditions in Iran and New Zealand influence how Facebook is used in these countries. In Iran, the government tries to control Facebook by blocking it and forcing people not to use this platform, while in New Zealand the state usually does not intervene in using Facebook. The Iranian government has blocked Facebook because the social laws and system in Iran are based on Islam (Hossein, 2016) and many things like drinking alcohol, prostitution, mixed gender parties, being gay or lesbian, or even promoting other religions and spiritual ideologies which are considered against Islam, are forbidden (Code, 2012). Facebook is considered to be an uncontrolled medium that provides a good setting for presenting these services. A phobia of social media could be seen in the expressed opinions of many influential politicians and clergymen. For

example, Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, a prominent clergyman, has said that the country's problems would remain unsolved as long as Iranians use the social media platforms, which are controlled by people outside Iran (ISNA, 2017). This antagonism between the dominant discourse in Iran and the uncontrolled Internet has resulted in strategies such as blocking many websites, threatening and punishing online activists, and encouraging people to use websites controlled by the government, rather than international platforms. Facebook is seen as a conduit for dangerous ideas, a pathway into the country from outside that cannot be easily controlled. For example, in 2018, after a very long argument among different political parties, the judiciary system decided to block the mobile application Telegram in Iran. Their stated reasons included: Telegram disturbs the social integrity of the society through bringing up racial and ethnic issues and provoking people to participate in protests and chaos in the society; Telegram is a spying tool to collect Iranians' important information for other countries; Telegram is being used to insult sacred Islamic values and promote deviant anti-Islam cults; and Telegram is a tool to promote discourses that are against the Islamic Republic as the dominant political discourse in Iran (alef.ir, 2018).

It is clear that in Iran the government is concerned about the way social media can be used to promote alternative discourses, so it blocks websites because they are not under government control and are considered to be against the dominant discourse. In comparison, in New Zealand, according to the censorship guide contained in The Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993, it is noted that items that could attract censorship are materials that reflect violence, torture, or the sexual exploitation of young people (MINISTRY OF JUSTICE , 2017). Therefore, there is no item that prohibits people's freedom to use different platforms, whether or not the government controls them.

8.2 Summary of findings

The findings of this study showed that although there are some similarities in how Facebook is used in Iran and New Zealand, the political and economic conditions have a significant influence on how it is used by tertiary students. As a qualitative study, it is not possible to make broad generalizations, however the results strongly underscore the role of context in people's use of social media. The main differences found in this study are discussed below:

8.2.1 Using Facebook in Iran requires breaking the law *vs* being a normal daily activity in New Zealand

The biggest difference in the influence of political conditions on Facebook use in Iran and New Zealand is that in Iran using Facebook is not supported by the dominant discourse. This means that any use of Facebook requires bypassing the blockage of the website, which could be considered an implicit resistance against the political system and the law. In New Zealand using Facebook is a normal daily activity that is accepted by the law. This fundamental difference has influenced many other functions of Facebook in Iran and New Zealand, for example, the relationship between Facebook and people's daily life in Iran and New Zealand. In addition to threatening or punishing online activists, as mentioned in Chapter 6, the Iranian government also attempts to stop Internet users from using international websites and social media platforms by encouraging people to spend their online time on websites that are managed from inside the country. In Iran, people usually buy internet access with a limited time or volume of data traffic. According to a rule, since 2018, internet users pay half-price for surfing websites of which their server is inside the country, and full-price for browsing international websites of which their server is outside of Iran (ictstartups.ir, 2018). In addition, the government has offered some Iranian mobile communication applications as alternatives to Telegram and made these apps free to use (yjc.ir, 2018). In the case of the Internet's new price policy in Iran, it is clear how the government attempts to protect its control over the content that is presented to the Internet users.

8.2.2 The role of Facebook in daily life in New Zealand *vs* Iran

The study suggests that for New Zealand participants using Facebook is more intertwined to their daily lives than for Iranian participants. The analysis of the collected data, especially from the interviews, found that in New Zealand the participants used Facebook as a tool to collect information and remain informed and engaged with what is happening around them, such as connecting to businesses around them or being in touch with their friends. In Iran, the interviewees described using Facebook to inform themselves about things that are happening outside of Iran, or to connect to people or celebrities who are not permitted in the country, and to be free from the controlled media and propaganda, or the government. The political situation in Iran, in which the dominant power has banned many things in the society that people like and feel a need for, has affected Iranians' priorities for using Facebook, as it is one of the few channels that connect them to the world outside of Iran. In comparison, in New Zealand the easy accessibility of Facebook enables people to use it to connect with each other and with businesses inside the country as well as outside.

8.2.3 Facebook as the media platform of the lifestyle that is not accepted by the government in Iran *vs* Facebook as a media beside other media platforms in New Zealand

Facebook tends to be used as the media platform of the underground lifestyle in Iran, while in New Zealand it is used alongside other media. As discussed, particularly in Chapter 4, in Iran Facebook is used as an alternative media to compensate for the lack of uncontrolled media platforms in the country. The type of marketing activities, online discussions, and public interests on Facebook indicate it is the media of alternative discourses, which relate to 'underground' lifestyles, in the Iranian context. In New Zealand, Facebook is used as a media platform beside the other media platforms, and in terms of content it is not dramatically different from other media in the country. The majority of advertisements and issues discussed on Facebook in New Zealand are similar to the other media platforms in the country.

However, in Iran Facebook usually provides information, advertisements and discussions that are not welcomed by the government and the government-controlled media. The analysis of the popular public Facebook pages in Iran and New Zealand, in Chapter 5, found that the majority of the Iranian pages are related to topics, such as a type of music or a musician, which are not supported by the government, and promote a counter-discourse among Facebook users, while in New Zealand the majority of pages are in harmony with the dominant discourse and people's daily lives.

8.2.4 The different levels of engagement between Iran and New Zealand in online discussion

The analysis in Chapter 6 showed that the quantity and quality of engagement in online discussions among Iranians and New Zealanders are significantly different, and Iranian Facebook users participate in online discussions much less than New Zealanders. Two of the reasons suggested for this level of participation include the price and accessibility of the Internet in Iran as well as the political situation that means people are concerned about the consequences of their expression of ideas. Some other factors, such as how citizens consider their ideas to be influential in the process of decision-making in the country, could influence this process. Accessing the Internet in Iran is very expensive and using different techniques to bypass the blockage of Facebook reduces the speed of the Internet and increases the cost of use, especially for people who pay for their Internet connection based on the time that they are connected for. This type of time-based connection plan is very common in Iran. In this situation, Iranian users prefer to use their available data and time to surf more pages rather than engage in online discussions.

The analysis found that in both Iran and New Zealand some Facebook users limit themselves from involvement in online discussions, however the reasons for that were different in both

countries. In New Zealand participants expressed that they stopped themselves from engaging in online discussions because of feeling they had inadequate knowledge about the discussed issues, and being concerned about how other people may react to their ideas. In contrast, several Iranian participants expressed being concerned about the government's reaction if they participated in discussions online.

According to Christensen (2010), freedom of expression has a direct effect on the quality of the public sphere, and, in fact, it is the base of any public sphere (Christensen, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 3, one of the most mentioned features of the Internet for discussion and other civic participation is the value of anonymity. However, the history of online social activism in Iran shows that Iranians cannot rely on online anonymity because many online activists have been traced and arrested by the government. For example, in 2016 six Facebook users were arrested for a short time by the revolutionary guard and threatened with spending a long time in jail (vocir.org, 2016). In another case, in 2016 around 700 Iranian journalists received a text message warning: 'any kind of contact and co-operation with enemies out of Iran via email or other communication is a crime and will be punished. You must disconnect your contact; this text message is the last warning to you' (dw.com, 2016).

Blocking websites and threatening users are two ways that the dominant political powers in Iran try to stop people using social media to promote an alternative discourse. However, sometimes these techniques are not enough to stop Facebook users from using it to resist the dominant discourse. Instead, punishment may be used to stop users from being active on social media.

8.2.5 Asking for radical changes in Iran *vs* asking for reforms in New Zealand

The legal position of Facebook in Iran, in addition to some other political factors such as freedom of speech or press freedom, has made Facebook a platform mainly for people who look for radical changes in the current power relations. In New Zealand, as a democratic country, people usually look for reforms in the system to improve the situation. However, in New Zealand it is still possible to find suggestions for a total change in the current discourse, and antagonistic arguments around topics such as racism are not rare. In both countries many users use Facebook without caring about political or economic changes, while in Iran because of the legal condition of using Facebook, simply using it can be a form of protest against the dominant discourse.

8.2.6 Elements of Using Facebook: incoherent in Iran *vs* coherent in New Zealand

The analysis of the relationship between different elements of Facebook use in Iran and New Zealand, as discussed in Chapter 7, found differences in how the elements align with each other. In New Zealand, all four elements – Facebook, the government, companies or celebrities, and regular users – work in coherent co-operation, and despite there being criticisms of one element by another one, this process continues to work and usually no element tries to disrupt this process. In comparison, in Iran usually there is no co-operation between these elements. For example, the government attempts to stop people from using Facebook, and Facebook, as a company, does not maintain a peaceful relationship with the Iranian government. In addition, the majority of popular Facebook pages in Iran are for celebrities who do not have a good relationship with the government. All these factors, plus other mentioned political reasons, have resulted in Facebook becoming a place of harsh and antagonistic critiques on the dominant discourse in Iran.

8.2.7 Resistance in Iran is local and radical *vs* in New Zealand resistance is local and international, and moderate

Resistance on Facebook happens in both Iran and New Zealand, however, some differences in the type of resistance between Iranian and New Zealand users have been observed. The differences in resistance have two main aspects. In both countries a combination of reformist opinions and radical revolutionary opinions are identifiable. However, observing the discussions on Facebook shows that, in Iran, most of the discussions very soon become redirected towards the government and toppling the dominant discourse. In New Zealand, critics tend to have a more balanced distribution among different levels of the social system and ask for reform at those levels.

One of the observed differences in approaches to resistance on Facebook is that while Iranian users may strongly and severely reject the dominant discourse, in many cases they do not introduce a clear alternative discourse. The New Zealand users were observed to be more likely to introduce an alternative discourse when criticizing the dominant discourse. Therefore, investigating this point in more detail could be a research topic for future studies in this field. Another observed difference in resistance was in the locality of those resistance activities, and whether the topic of resistance is local or international. While Iranians usually engage in resistance against the domestic dominant discourse, New Zealand Facebook users, in addition to local issues, engaged in international issues such as climate change.

8.3 How this study contributes to knowledge

This thesis contributes to knowledge about Facebook use in different aspects of methodology, theoretical framework and findings. This study attempted to connect the micro activities of people who use Facebook to macro social factors such as political or economic conditions in Iran and New Zealand. Because of that, the study required developing a suitable theoretical

framework that covers these macro and micro aspects. by combining affordances, political economy, public sphere, and discourse theory; a new theoretical framework was developed which could be useful for other researchers also. This study attempted to present a model for a Foucauldian discourse analysis of Facebook, which could be developed and become useful for other studies. In addition, reviewing literature on Facebook and social media studies in Iran and New Zealand showed that investigating the use of Facebook as a large-scale social activity, which could be related to the political and economic conditions in these countries, has not received much attention from scholars.

In terms of methodology, this thesis attempted to collect and connect data from different sources to answer the research questions. Collecting data from Iranian students faced frequent problems because of the political conditions in Iran, however each time an alternative way of collecting data was designed and applied. For example, when interviewing Iranian students who live inside Iran looked impossible, the methodology was adapted to focus on Iranian students who live in New Zealand. When applying an online questionnaire was impossible then a printed questionnaire was used to collect as much data as possible. In addition, the observation and document reviewing have been applied to enrich the collected data and also improve the depth of the results. These methods can help other researchers to design a more comprehensive research methodology.

Apart from theoretical and methodological contributions, this thesis develops the existing knowledge of Facebook use in Iran and New Zealand. There are some studies on using Facebook in Iran, however, because researchers who live inside the country undertake most of those studies, they have not investigated the effect of political conditions on using Facebook. The focus of this thesis adds new data about using Facebook in Iran. Although there are some

studies about using Facebook in New Zealand, the quantity of publications is not comparable to the pervasiveness of Facebook use in this country and many aspects of using Facebook in New Zealand, such as the effect of political and economic conditions on using Facebook, had been unexplored. This thesis also offers new knowledge for Facebook studies in New Zealand. In addition, this study attempts to connect using Facebook in Iran and New Zealand to the political and economic conditions in these countries in a new form of comparative research. Therefore, it can help to reach a better understanding of the relationship between conditions in real life and how people behave on Facebook.

8.4 Additional findings

This thesis examined the influence of two important contextual factors on how tertiary students use Facebook in Iran and New Zealand. Reviewing the existing literature suggested that political and economic conditions in these countries had influenced the scholarship of Facebook in these countries. This issue could be an important issue for academics who try to protect their freedom and minimize the impact of politics and the economy on their works. In addition, this thesis found that although Facebook has given a voice to some groups in these countries, still many political, economic and even social factors stop people from participating in it. Therefore, to have a free media platform that gives similar opportunities to people, it is necessary to provide media platforms with minimal intervention from the economy and politics. Furthermore, this study found that accessing a media platform and an even lower impact of politics and economics are not the only factors for having the highest online engagements. The study found that there are some other social and cultural factors that need to be addressed to increase online participation.

Postscript

The research documented in this thesis may provide the basis for different kinds of future study. It addresses several different aspects of Facebook use in Iran and New Zealand, focusing on political economy and the public sphere. The theoretical framework of the study is an attempt to bind theories that may look contradictory: Habermas' view on Public sphere and Foucault' point of view of resistance. The thesis makes an important contribution to the academic literature on social media use in Iran, in particular, but also in New Zealand in relation to the political economy of Facebook. There is considerable scope to develop more research in this area in future. Several specific areas relate to participation in online public discussion, the theoretical framework, how the framework could be applied to other social media platforms, the scope of resistance to dominant discourses on social media, and the role of censorship. These will be expanded below.

Interviewing New Zealand students showed that some social factors hindered them from participating in online conversations. Considering the importance of online public discussion for democracy, if this functions as a public sphere, it would be valuable to study the social factors that limit young people from participating in online discussion. Studying these factors could also lead to finding ways to help the younger generations to become more involved in online discussion and enrich the public sphere and democracy in New Zealand.

The theoretical framework of the study is a combination of a few different theoretical points of view such as political economy of Facebook, Facebook as a public sphere, discourse of Facebook and resistance. The findings of this study suggest that this theoretical model could be polished and developed to become more applicable for future studies in different

countries. For example, adding two theoretical concepts to the model would empower it significantly: the Facebook algorithm and digital labor. The Facebook algorithm is central to understanding and exploring the power of Facebook. Digital labor can help to understand the political economy of Facebook and how big companies as well as the Facebook Company use the free labor of users, for example in creating or sharing the content. Although both these concepts have been mentioned in this thesis, they could play more important roles in future theoretical models for studying the subjects such as the power or political economy of Facebook.

The process of this study highlighted that in Iran using social media apps such as Instagram or WhatsApp has become very popular for the younger generations, while other apps that are popular among New Zealand youth, such as Snapchat or TiKTok, are still not widely used in Iran. This could be because of the social conditions in these countries, which would be productive to research. One of the conditions that could affect the less popularity of TikTok among Iranians, is that TikTok is based on sharing videos and as it has been mentioned in the thesis the price of using Internet hinders Iranian use of social media platforms which are based on sharing video such as TikTok or even photo like Snapchat.

A major focus of this thesis is how people use Facebook to resist dominant discourse, particularly in relation to strict censorship. In Iran, as shown in this study, being able to express opinions in a less controlled environment is a crucial factor that attracts people to Facebook, as it is considered free from the strict censorship that limits other media platforms in Iran. Controlling media through strict censorship policies has a long history in Iran. Censoring public media such as the press began in order to restrict Farsi newspapers, published outside of Iran but distributed widely inside the country, from criticising the Shah

and ruling powers (Ekhtiar, 1994). The first newspaper published in Iran, **VAGHAYE ETTEFAGHIE,** was government-owned and aimed at reflecting the king's interests rather than news (Ekhtiar, 1994). Although censorship in Iran is as old as the public media, most studies on censorship in Iran have studied a specific period, such as before or after the 1987 Islamic revolution, or the censorship of a specific media platform such as newspapers rather than all media platforms. In consequence of the censorship regimes and policies that have been applied in Iran, as in other countries, people have always adopted strategies and solutions to elude the restrictions. For example, as discussed in the thesis, before the Islamic Revolution, people used cassette tapes and telephone to send messages inside Iran, and then published the received messages and distributed them door to door, secretly. Studying these and similar strategies and solutions can help in forming a better understanding of how people approach media to fulfil their requirements. A focus on censorship regimes could also examine to what extent different censorship or resistance strategies are effective. In addition, the question of how changing media technologies could affect censorship regimes in Iran, or in New Zealand, has received little attention from researchers and could be a topic for future research.

Furthermore, as Rahimi (2015) argues, censorship can happen through reactive or proactive regulations. Reactive regulations are very direct policies to limit people from accessing specific media content, which clearly determines Facebook use in Iran. Proactive media-controlling strategies may advertise new forms of media technologies, services or content, to push back unwanted media platforms or media contents. This is evident in China, where the government has successfully substituted local versions of western social media platforms. Chinese company ByteDance has expanded this with the launch of Tiktok, as an international

version of the video sharing app Douyin. Some western countries, such as the U.S., have taken reactive actions against TikTok and tried to block it (theguardian.com, 2020).

This study has shown that to control Facebook, the strategies applied by power holders in Iran and New Zealand are different. Iran has usually tried to choose reactive policies, and has not been successful in proactive censorship attempts. As discussed in the thesis, the Iranian government tries to encourage people to use local social media platforms rather than Facebook or Instagram but this attempt has not been successful. Studying the regimes of censorship in Iran and New Zealand, as well as the results of these approaches could be very helpful to understand the mechanisms of use and control of media in these countries, and others like them.

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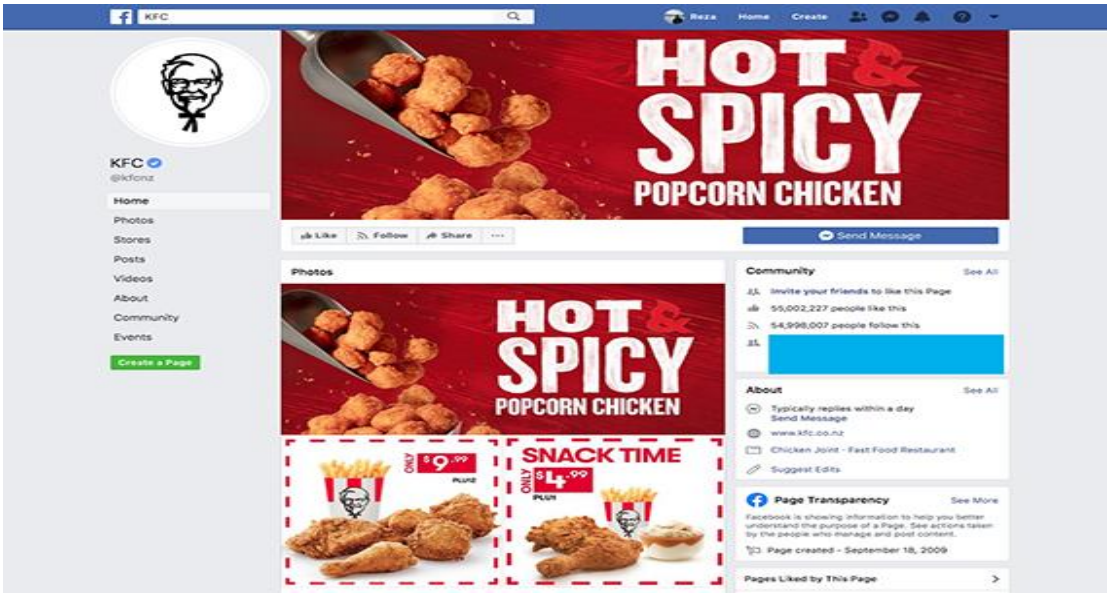
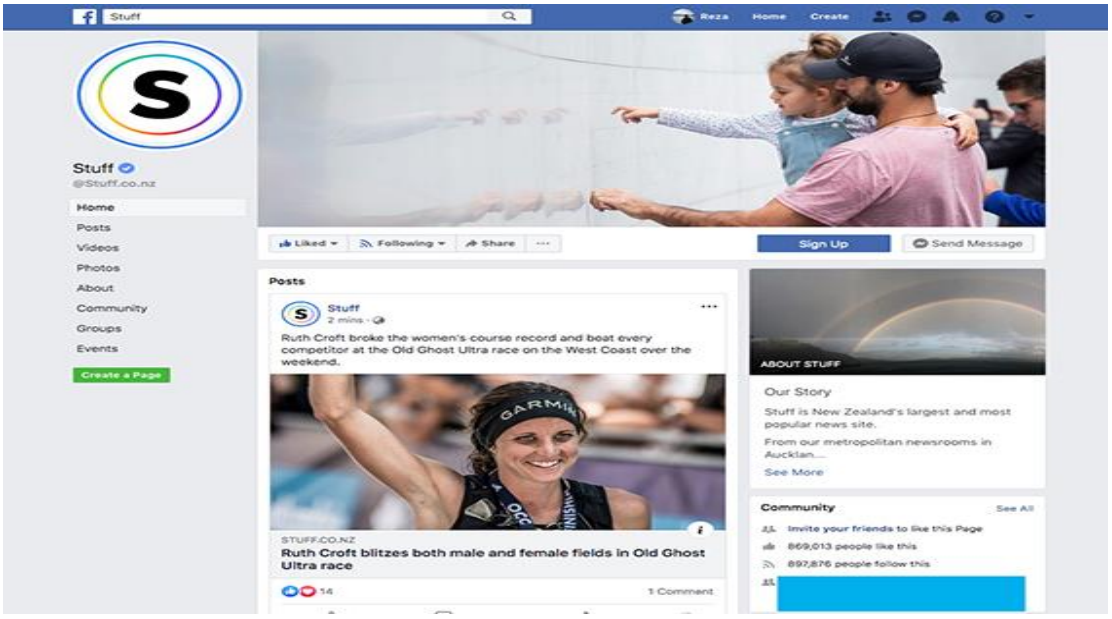
Appendix A: The observed sample of Facebook pages

KFC NZ Facebook page



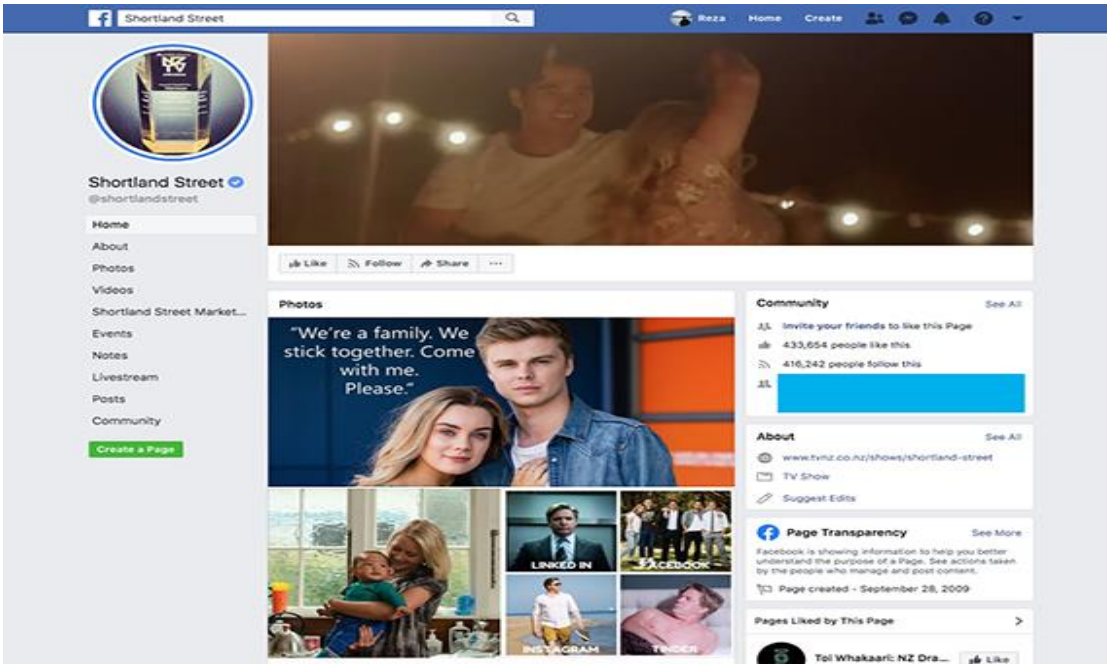
https://www.facebook.com/kfcnz/?brand_redir=103737039656866

Stuff.co.nz Facebook page



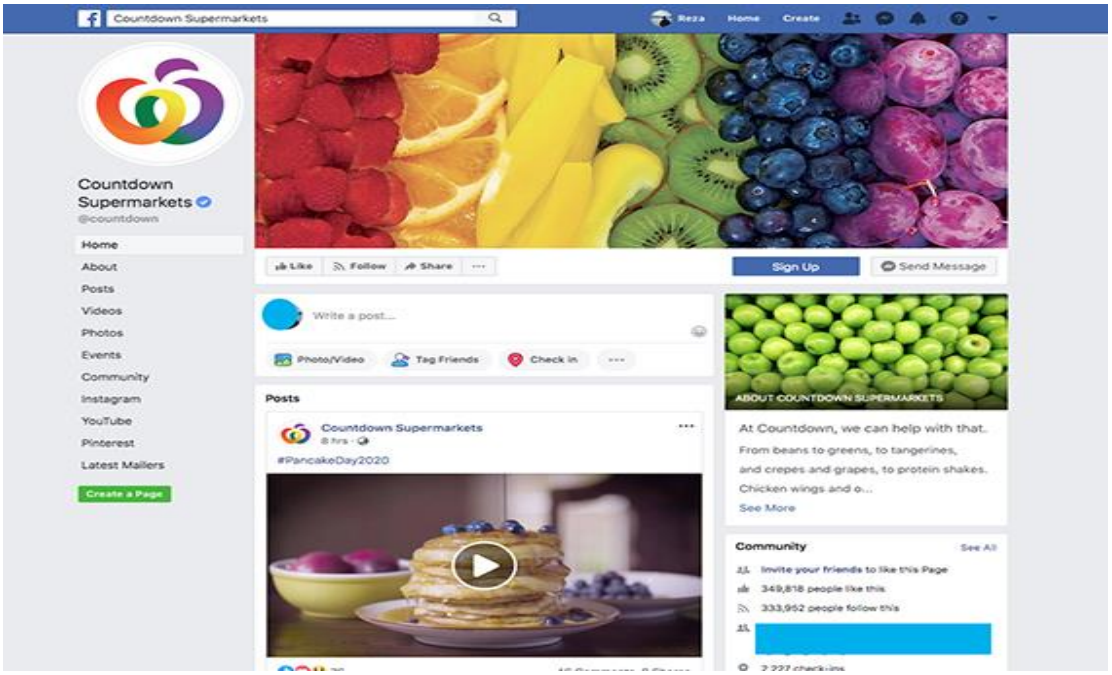
https://www.facebook.com/Stuff.co.nz/

Shorthand Street Facebook page



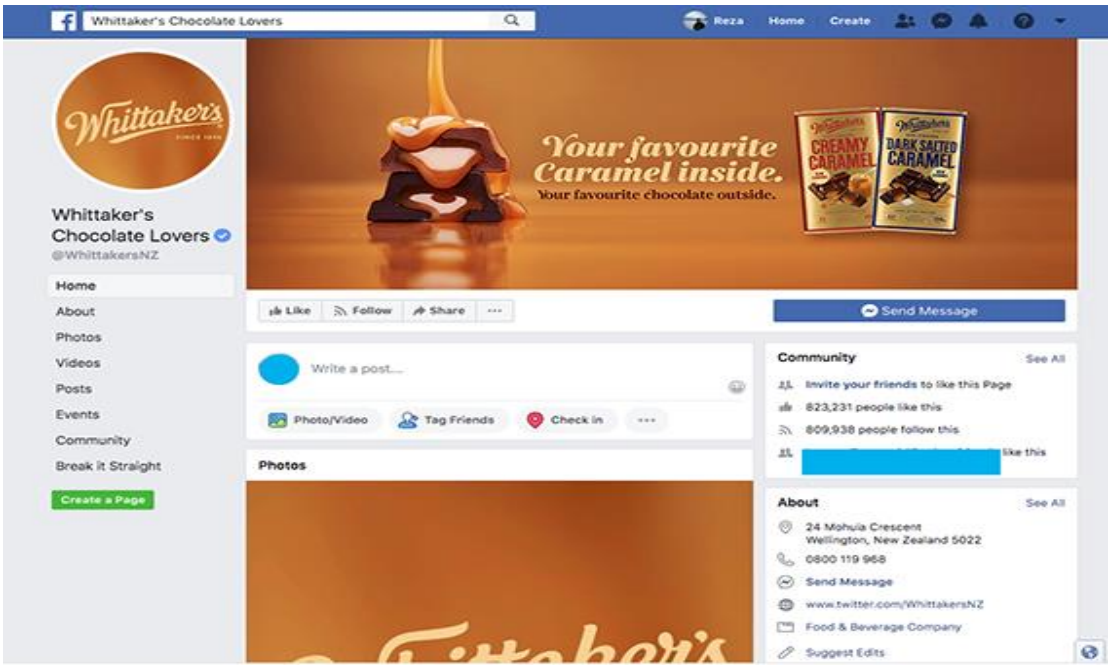
https://www.facebook.com/shortlandstreet/

Countdown Supermarkets Facebook Page



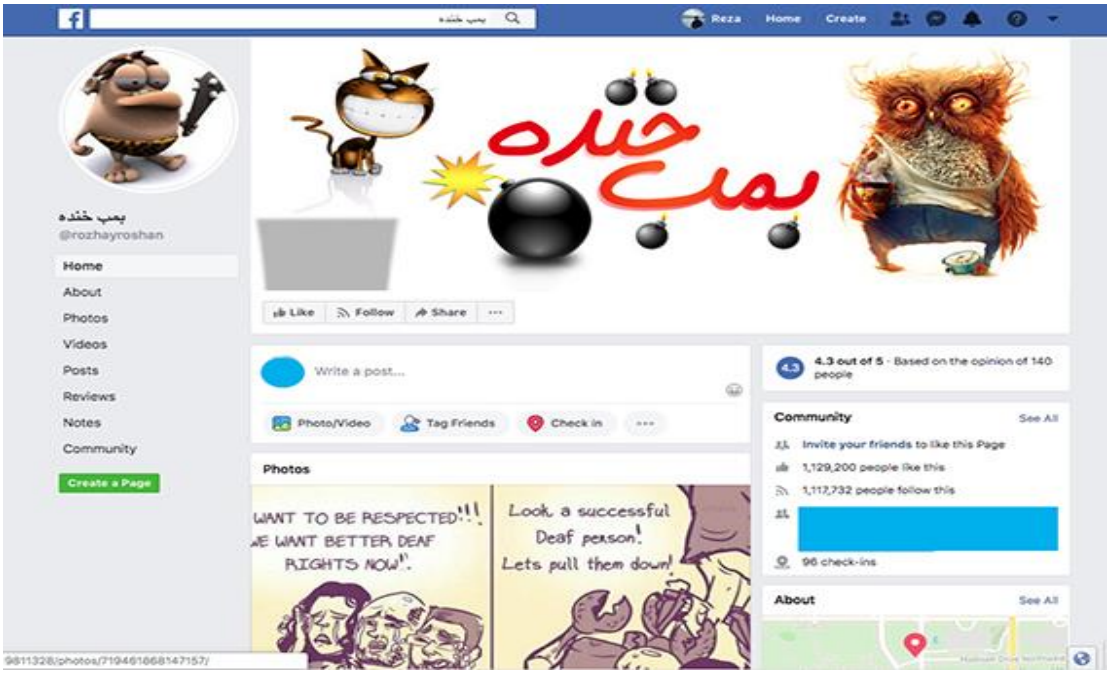
https://www.facebook.com/countdown/?ref=br_rs

Whittaker’s Chocolate Lovers Facebook page



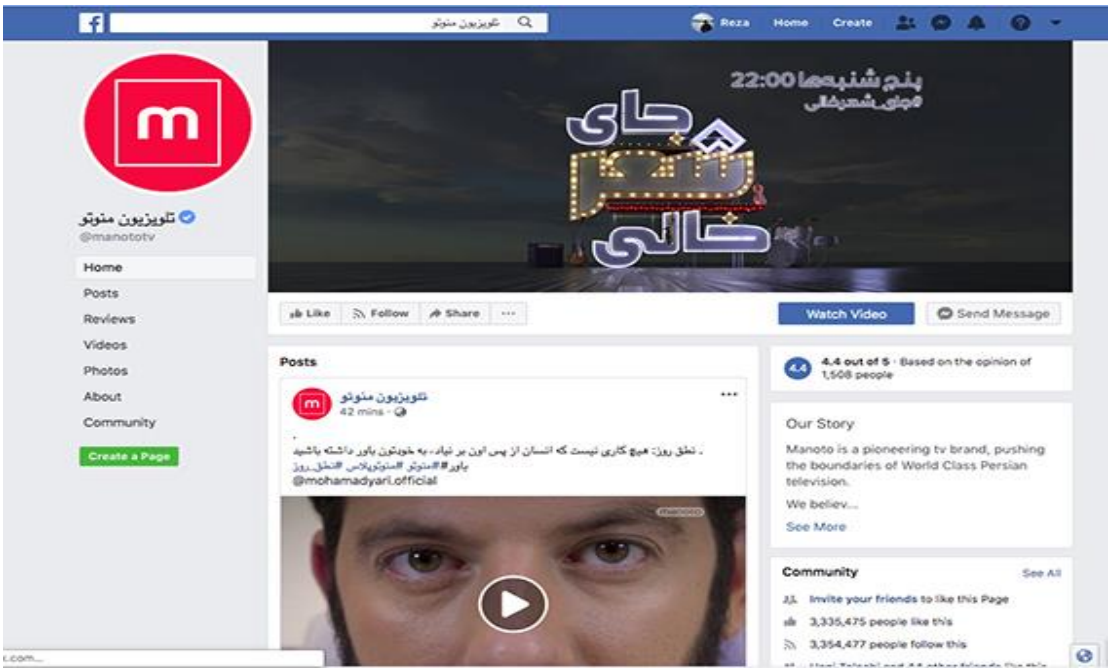
https://www.facebook.com/WhittakersNZ/

Bomb e Khandeh Facebook page



https://www.facebook.com/rozhayroshan/?ref=br_rs

Manoto TV Facebook page

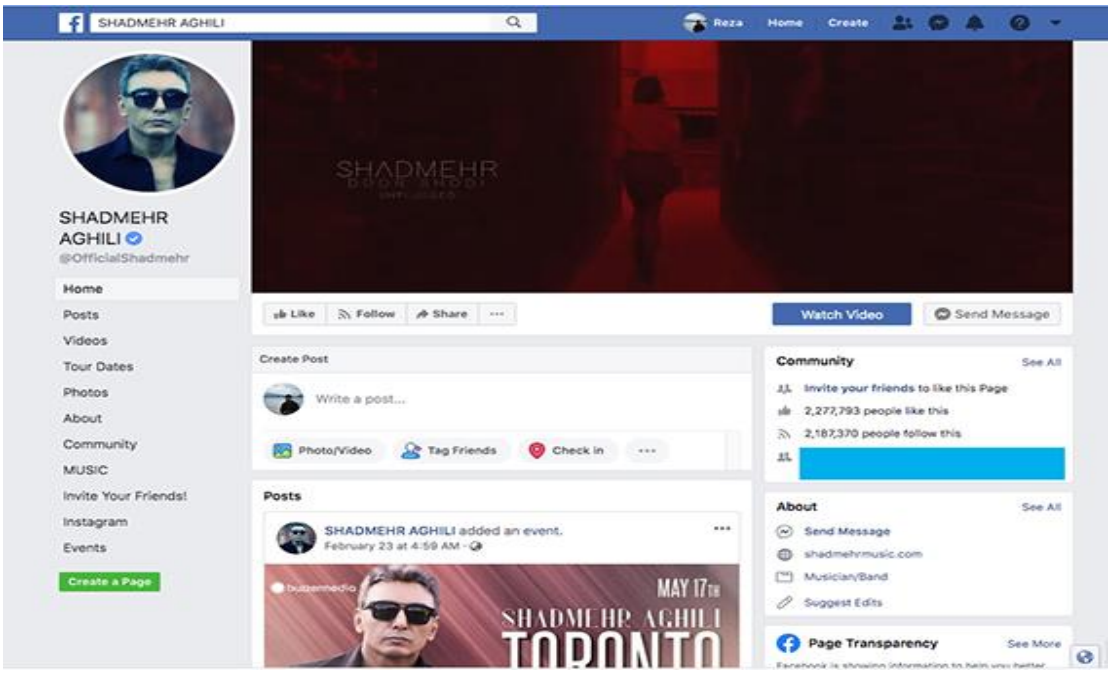


https://www.facebook.com/manototv/?ref=br_rs

Ebi Facebook page

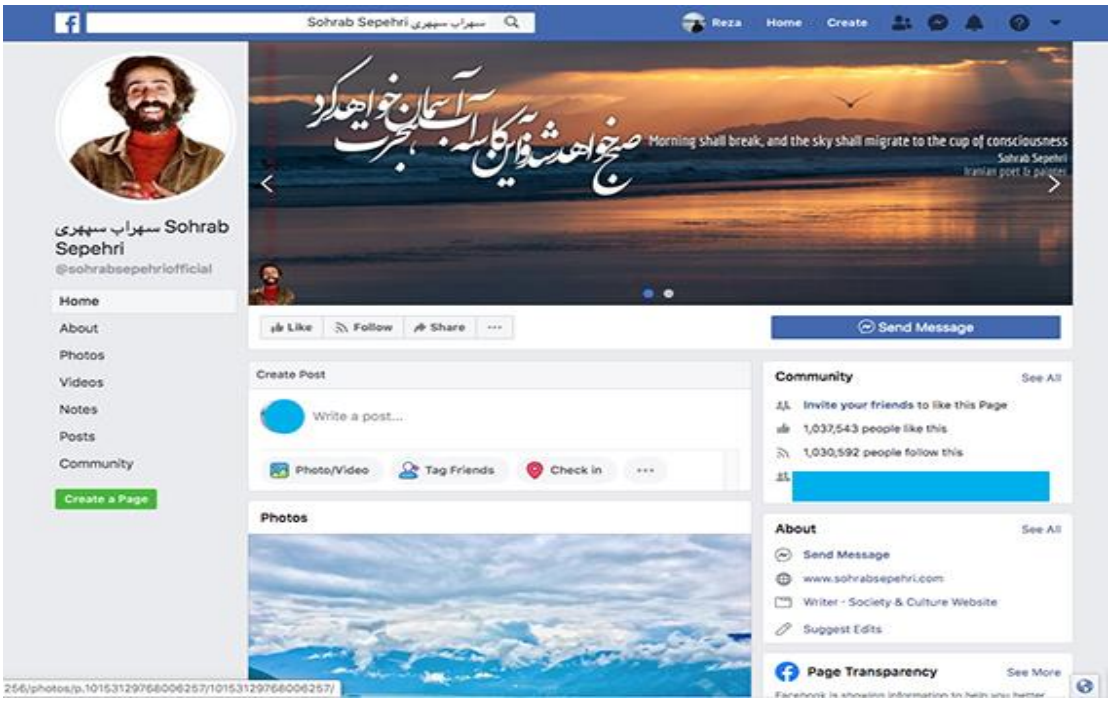
https://www.facebook.com/ebi/?ref=br_rs

Shadmehr Aghili Facebook page



https://www.facebook.com/OfficialShadmehr/

Sohrab Sepehri Facebook page



https://www.facebook.com/sohrabsepehriofficial/?ref=br_rs

Appendix B: Online Questionnaire

1- What is your age bracket?
18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 +65

2- What is your gender?
Male Female

3- What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- Secondary education
- Graduated from high school
- Completed bachelor degree
- Completed Masters or PhD

4- In a typical day, about how much time do you spend using Facebook?
- None
- 1-30 minutes
- 30-60 minutes
- 1-2 hours
- Over 2 hours

5- Please respond to the following statements by indicating on a 5-point scale (1 = not important, 2 = X, 3 = X, 4 = X and 5 = very important)

1) How important is the issue highlighted in the statement to you?
2) How important is the political environment in your country as a factor influencing this issue
3 How important is the economic environment in your country as a factor influencing this issue

Facebook enables me to keep my personal information private	1) Importance for you 1 2 3 4 5	2) Influence of political environment 1 2 3 4 5	3) Influence of economic environment 1 2 3 4 5
Facebook enables me to access to the information I need	Importance for you 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5
Facebook enables me to build or expand my social network	Importance for you 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5
Facebook enables me to comment on or criticize different topics rather than only be an observer	Importance for you 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5

Facebook enables me to exchange the information with other users *fast*	Importance for you 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5
Facebook is attractive because it uses different media formats such as audio, video, photo and text at the same time	Importance for you 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5
Facebook enables me to have a persistent engagement in different issues	Importance for you 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5
Facebook enables me to access a big range of audience despite the distance and time barriers	Importance for you 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5
Facebook enables me to collaborate with other people with the same interest to take actions	Importance for you 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5
Facebook helps me to learn New things	Importance for you 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5
Facebook is a good way for me to run my business and make money	Importance for you 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5	The effect of political environment 1 2 3 4 5

6- Do you usually receive information or advertisement from a brand or business you like on your Facebook page?

Never Rarely sometimes usually always

7- Please indicate how you typically engage with economic and political posts on Facebook. Please indicate the intensity of your activity on a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 = never engage and 5 = always engage.

The post	Like the post	Comment on the post	Share the post	Reply to a comment on the post
Economic posts from a brand or business	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Political posts	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

8- The following questions ask about how people communicate on the public Facebook pages. Please indicate your level of agreement to these statements

Participants in online discussions on Facebook try to achieve other goals rather than just expressing their opinions	
Participants in online discussions on Facebook genuinely try to reach agreement and improve understanding regarding different issues	
All different ideas have a similar chance to be presented and become visible on Facebook	
Participants in discussions on Facebook have enough knowledge about the topic that they discuss	
Participants in discussions on Facebook are free from any type of pressure and can present their opinions freely.	
In Facebook discussions, only the power of logic and reasoning defines the winner of the discussion.	

9- Facebook enables me to use the media content which is not easily available other media platforms such as TV, Newspapers, cinema, Radio in my country.

Totally disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Totally agree

Appendix C: Information Sheet and Consent Form

Department: Media and Communication studies
Telephone: …
Email: reza.jarvandi@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
31/07/2019
HEC Ref: HEC 2015/72

Project: how political and economic conditions affect how Facebook is used by tertiary students; a comparative study between Iranian and New Zealand university students

Information Sheet for the interview participants

This project is part of my PhD study in the field of Media and Communication and it has been approved by the Human Ethic Committee (HEC) of the University of Canterbury. The aim of this study is to explore how political and economic conditions influence how Facebook is used by tertiary students. This is a comparative study between Iranian and New Zealand university students. In this project I will explore the expectations that Facebook users have of Facebook, how they apply Facebook, ideas about benefits of Facebook, how they use Facebook as part of their everyday lives, and also how political and economic conditions in their country affect their use of Facebook.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this study will be in form of a face to face interview and the interview will be audio recorded. During the interview, you will be asked some general questions about your Facebook use as well as your idea about the influence of economic and political conditions in your country on how people use Facebook. The interview will take about 60-90 minutes. You have been approached to take part in this study because you have showed your interest to participate in this study. I have located your contact details through the email/message you sent to me. You will receive a code or pseudonym before the interview and your name will not be used during the interview. Therefore, the report will only address you or anyone you refer to by just using the code. You will have the opportunity to receive the transcript of the interview in order to review it. Recorded interviews will be kept

by the researcher in a password protected computer and will be destroyed 10 years after the interview.

The results of the study will be available in a PhD thesis through which is a public document and available through the UC Library. The results also might be published in academic journals. If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts in one week after the interview, it will become almost impossible to remove the influence of your data on the results.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public without your prior consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, you will receive a code or pseudonym before the interview and your name will not be used during the interview. Therefore, the report will only address you or anyone you refer to by just using the code. You will have the opportunity to receive the transcript of the interview in order to review it. Recorded interviews will be kept by the researcher in a password protected computer and will be destroyed 10 years after the interview.

Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project.

The project is being carried out as a requirement of PhD in media and communication by Reza Jarvandi under the supervision of Dr. Zita Joyce, who can be contacted at zita.joyce@canterbury.ac.nz. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return it to the researcher via the email provided in this form or before the interview starts.

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Department : Media and Communication Studies
Telephone: ...
Email: reza.jarvandi@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Project: how political and economic conditions affect how Facebook is used by tertiary students; a comparative study between Iranian and New Zealand university students

Consent Form for Participation in the interview

Include a statement regarding each of the following:

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after ten years.
- ☐ I understand that this interview will be audio recorded by the researcher.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact Reza Jarvandi via reza.jarvanandi@pg.canterbury.ac.nz or D. Zita Joyce via zita.joyce@canterbury.ac.nz for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- ☐ I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- ☐ By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name:_____ Signed:_____ Date:_____

Email address *(for report of findings, if applicable)*:

You can email back the consent form or bring it back with you to the interview session

Appendix D: More Details about Figure 44

This photo is one of the most famous photos of the Vietnam war. This photo was taken by Nick Ut on June 8 1972, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize. The girl in the photo, Kim Phuc, is informally called 'Napalm girl'.[1]